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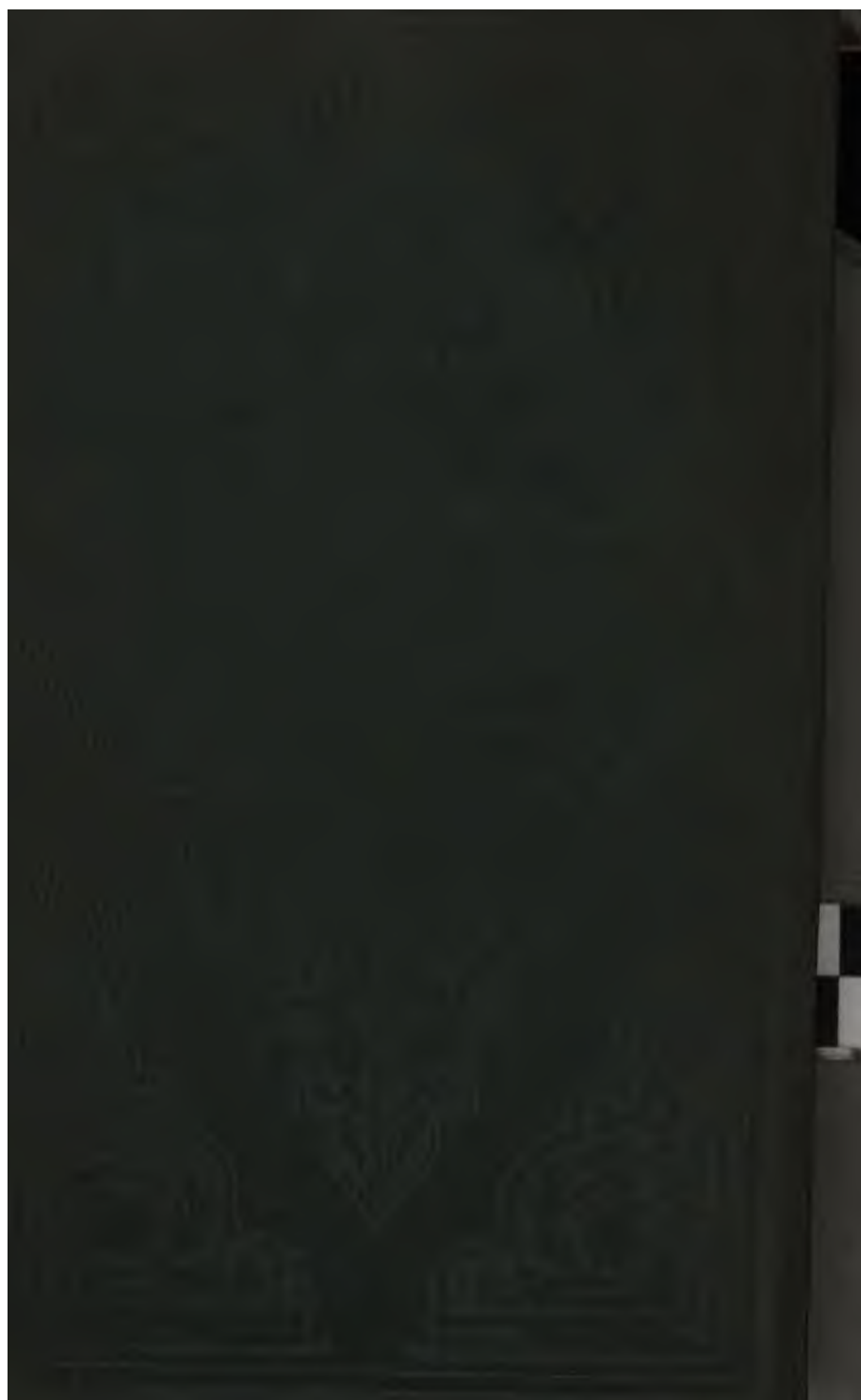
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VOL. I.



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LOVE *versus* LAW.

CHAPTER I.

GOLD !

Heart hath not power to conceive, nor pen to pourtray, the magic influence of the precious metal. It is the Baal before which every knee bows down—the shrine upon which every human offering is laid. One of the earliest and most important lessons of childhood is, ‘get gold ;’ and as the experience of after life too frequently proves, let man acquire what he may—honour, approbation, esteem—it will avail him but little if he neglect this, the first prudential warning,—and lay not up for himself a goodly store of Gold ! It is a stern and startling truth, but who will have the hardihood to gainsay it !

VOL. I.

B

The mammon of unrighteousness works miracles !

The senator—the advocate—the scholar—the man of business—and the artizan—may toil early and late—each wearing out the very pith of life in the almost hourly pursuit of his avocation—and yet if he wins not wealth as his reward—*cui bono* ? We love virtue—esteem integrity—applaud industry and perseverance—but we *worship* Gold !

The Millionaire, let him be who he may, or what he may, is the man above all others ! —the man of weight—the man of influence ! There is a music in the ducat's ring, surpassing even the sweetness of the voice's purest eloquence !

Gold ! Gold !!

How the ear opens, how the heart throbs at the sound. Whisper but the word, and there are a thousand listeners in a moment at your feet ; say where and how it may be won, and there are, at once, a thousand eager votaries in pursuit. No danger, no privation, is sufficiently startling to deter

them from the task—suffering, disease, even death itself, may stare them in the face, and yet such is their longing after Gold that, rather than throw away one chance of its acquirement, they are ready to peril all.

Show me your El-Dorado; I will leave its Gold untouched, and weep above the human hecatomb !

There is not, perhaps, throughout the county of York, (rich as it unquestionably is in noble mansions and princely domains,) a more magnificent residence or estate than that of Temple-Thorpe. It is situated at a distance of some five or six miles from the large manufacturing town of L——, and in a district proverbial for its fertility and luxuriance. The mansion, which is composed of that peculiarly dark and imperishable brick so much in fashion during the respective reigns of Henry VIII. and Elizabeth, is of a triangular form; its centre or principal front being ornamented with various devices

worked in stone slabs, peculiar to the age in which it was built, while the right and left wings of the building, though less elaborately adorned, have each also a fair share of ornamental masonry, standing out in bold relief from their dark, and otherwise, it might seem, cold background. The large portico over the principal door-way presents also as fine and perhaps as perfect a specimen of masonic art as may be met with either in this or in any other country ; and the heavy stone mullions and deep sills of its small-paned windows, of which, by the way, there are an unusual number, are in perfect keeping and harmonize well with the general style and character of the whole. Round the top of the building and throughout the whole length of the triangle (the roof on every side being perfectly hid), runs a bold trellicing of iron-work, inwrought on the principal front with large and legible gilt letters, setting forth the motto of the house—

“Rex est qui metuit nihil

Hoc regnum sibi quisque dat.”

The park, which consists of some five or six hundred acres, is profusely stocked with large clusters of immense forest trees, many of which, judging from their strong and gigantic proportions, one might readily fancy of a growth and date anterior even to the mansion itself. The ground, for some distance from the house, runs with a slow and gradual descent, towards the banks of a wide and rapid streamlet, which may here and there be seen pursuing its tortuous and snake-like course from one side of the landscape to the other; beyond this the country assumes a different aspect, the land at first slightly hilly and undulating, rises suddenly to an immense height, displaying every now and then a thickly wooded gorge or ravine not very dissimilar (excepting in its fertility), to what one so frequently meets with in many of the mountainous districts of Scotland. The whole landscape, in fact, when we look beyond the streamlet—presents as perfect and pleasing a picture of luxuriant mountain scenery, as a poet or a painter could desire. In the

extreme distance, and as far almost as the eye is capable of discerning one object from another, stands the principal entrance to the estate—forming a chaste and not unclassical object from the windows of the principal reception rooms of the mansion. Here and there, too, at different points of the landscape, may be seen various ornamental temples, gothic buildings, and rustic seats, and all so skilfully and artistically arranged as to give an additional charm to a scene which, had they not been there, one would have thought incapable of improvement. The principal, and by far the most imposing, object in the landscape, however, is the old Abbey of Temple-Thorpe, which stands embowered amidst a thick cluster of oak and beech trees, at a distance of a mile or a mile and a half from the mansion. Although now fast falling into ruin and decay, it still presents sufficient indications of its original extent and architectural design to render it an object of interest to the tourist as well as to the antiquarian. For the latter, indeed, it

possesses no ordinary attractions, being linked with many historical recollections; and presenting in certain portions, which have escaped the ravages of the devastating tyrant Time, the most perfect specimens of the architectural art of a by-gone age. The cloisters and refectory are especially remarkable, remaining to all appearance perfect, almost as they were some three or four hundred years ago, and surpassing in magnitude every thing of the kind to be met with elsewhere. At the period of our story, which is of comparatively modern date, a beautiful cottage had been formed in the interior of the building, and so arranged that a small portion of the ruin itself was converted to the purposes of this modern residence. It was a dull gloomy-looking place; and yet there was an air of witchery about its gloominess that could scarcely fail to win the admiration of the most careless and indifferent observer. The dark rooms—the long vaulted passages—the massive, arched door-ways, and strongly mullioned windows, were dull

and melancholy enough—but then the internal arrangements and domestic garniture, were all of so charming and useful a character that one could not but feel impressed with an involuntary sense of the comforts, or perhaps more properly it might be said of the luxuries, which there presented themselves. They were luxuries, however, purchased by the cost of a refined taste and good management—rather than by the prodigal outlay of wealth. It were impossible to look upon that dwelling, or to survey even its meanest apartment, without feeling that the presiding deity of the place was of no common and ordinary nature. Nor was this feeling at all dissipated when one turned for a moment to contemplate the few, and evidently much treasured, articles of art and virtu which were arranged, here and there, throughout the principal rooms. Few, indeed, they were—but they were one and all of the highest character. Paintings, bronzes, statuettes, which would not have disgraced the studio of the most scrupulous virtuoso in the land

It was evident, even to the mere casual observer, that those works of art were treasured not only for their own intrinsic worth, but from a deep devotion to art itself! None, save one possessing the most refined and artistic taste, could so have arranged the works of a Rosa or a Caracci—could so have placed them that every alternation of light and shade brought out some new beauty, and laid bare some further proof of the painter's thorough mastery of his art. Many there are who treasure such things—but they treasure them for the pounds, shillings, and pence value, they have attained in the eyes of the world, rather than from any higher and more classical feeling.

This, however, was not the case with the tenant of the Abbey Cottage.

CHAPTER II.

HAVING briefly described the mansion and estate of Temple-Thorpe, it now behoves us to say a few words of its inhabitants.

Mr. Percival André Belmont, the owner and occupier of the mansion, was a man between fifty and sixty years old, and a thorough martyr to all the infirmities usually attendant upon so advanced an age. His appearance, (which, even in the prime of manhood, had never been very prepossessing), was disagreeable and repulsive—and it were impossible for his most intimate friends to feel perfectly easy and at home in his presence. The cold, selfish, sarcastic expression, that lit up his thin cadaverous features and the sharp penetrating glance of his small grey eyes, were sufficient of themselves to raise an involuntary feeling of distrust in all who



beheld them ; nor did they, in the least, belie the true character of their owner. A prouder, or a more selfish and penurious man, it would have been difficult to meet with—and these harsh and forbidding traits of character were relieved by none of those finer feelings, or better sympathies, which may occasionally be found existent in the most hard and depraved hearts. There are instances, indeed, where the redeeming characteristics of a repulsive nature are, at times, almost sufficient to induce us to overlook the evil in our admiration of the good. Such, however, was not the case with reference to Mr. Belmont. His was a harsh, rough, and impenetrable nature, which each succeeding year, as it came round, bringing with it its increased amount of physical prostration and debility, seemed only to render more stubborn and confirmed. He had been educated, in early life, for the profession of the law ; a profession, perhaps, of all others the least calculated for a man of a narrow and naturally selfish disposition, inasmuch as the

daily avocations of a lawyer are almost certain to bring him, more or less, into contact with the selfishness and chicanery of others, until he becomes so accustomed to, and familiarized with, the most questionable transactions of every-day life, that he ceases to look upon his own personal failings as infirmities of character, and glories rather in the conviction that he is enabled, by the depth of his superior foresight and cunning, to overreach others as they themselves have overreached their neighbours. It may truly be said, that the introduction of such men into the profession has contributed more than any other cause, to bring that profession into its present universal bad odour and disrepute; and we cannot but occasionally feel, that there is much truth in the poet's satire—

“ He saw a lawyer killing a viper
On a dunghill beside his own stable;
And the devil he smil'd, for 't put him in mind
Of Cain and his brother Abel.”

At the time of which we are now speaking Mr. Belmont had been in possession of the

estate of Temple-Thorpe for a period of fifteen or sixteen years. How he had become possessed thereof, and how his fortune was built upon the wreck of others—the sequel of our story must shew, for the present it is sufficient to remark, that his title to it was generally admitted to be strictly *legal*, and as such it may fairly be presumed unimpeachable. His wife, who was a woman of superior character, possessing great moral and intellectual powers, had died within twelve months after his accession to fortune, leaving him but two children (one, at that time, a fair high-spirited boy of twelve years of age, the other, a gentle, delicate girl, of some seven years) to enliven the solitude of his widowhood, and to lessen the weight of his irreparable loss. A loss, by the way, of which even the proud and selfish Mr. Belmont could not but feel deeply sensible.

Reginald (such was the boy's name) inherited many of his father's failings and infirmities; he was proud, rash, and impetuous, and directly opposed both in temper and

disposition to the mild and unassuming Marian—who seemed, like her deceased parent, to be endowed with a spirit of unvarying gentleness and humility. Nor did either of them, as they advanced in years, become materially changed; their early characteristics, despite the influence of schooling and education, still survived. And when, after the lapse of some years, the brother and sister, having passed the period of their pupillage—one at college, the other in London—again returned, to take up their abode under the paternal roof—it was evident to all that their childhood's nature still predominated. Softened and subdued it may be—but still there it was—deeply rooted as ever.

We will now turn to the Abbey Cottage. Its tenant, Mrs. Belmont, or as she was generally called, and as we shall hereafter designate her, the Widow Belmont, was sister-in-law to the present owner of Temple-Thorpe. She was a staid delicate woman, and although somewhat advanced beyond the me-

ridian of life, her features still bore evidence of the surpassing beauty of her earlier years ; and had it not been for the sad expression of her bright hazel eyes, and the melancholy smile which would occasionally steal across her cheek, one might almost have come to the conclusion that Time had passed her by with an unusually gentle and sparing hand. Not so, however ; the Widow Belmont had had many bitter trials, and her sweet fair face served only to belie her crushed and lacerated heart. She was good, gentle, and noble-hearted, as she was beautiful ; and few, if any, who had once become intimately acquainted with her were ever heard to utter a word in her dispraise. True it is, the tenant of the Abbey Cottage had her failings and infirmities (and who indeed has not ?) but she had so accustomed herself to commune with her own heart, to familiarize herself with her own nature and character, that, although she might not wholly succeed in eradicating, she was ever successful in concealing those failings and infirmities from the eyes of a

prying and ill-natured world. And yet; she was no trickster—she did but carry on that mental antagonism which all who have any regard for their own welfare, or for the veneration of others, must sooner or later become accustomed to practise. Plunged at an early age into the furnace of affliction, left as it were like a scathed tree in the wilderness, desolate and cast down, she had fled from the noisy and turbulent world, and passed the mid-day years of life in solitude and seclusion. Then it was that she first began really and truly to understand her own heart, to know her own nature — and then it was, having gained this, the most important of all human knowledge, that she first began to ennoble and purify her character, giving full play to the nobler faculties with which by nature she was endowed, and schooling to the best of her ability all those secret and insidious promptings of the heart, which if left to themselves, unfettered and unrestrained, lead us into a thousand errors, and entail upon us an incal-

culable weight of care and suffering. In a word, the Widow Belmont, naturally gifted with the highest qualities both of head and heart, had been purified, ennobled, spiritualised by affliction and solitude. Having said thus much, it is perhaps scarcely necessary to add that few women possessed higher intellectual attainments, or were more thoroughly impressed with a due sense of their incomparable worth. The small well-chosen library, the collection of paintings, and the few articles of virtu she had been allowed to retain as her own, and to remove from the mansion at the time it had fallen into the hands of Mr. Percival André Belmont, were treasured with miserly care. It might be, however, that another feeling, still more powerful than admiration for the works of genius, had some weight in this matter. There was scarcely an article in the Widow's collection of ornamental treasures which had not connected with it some pleasing memory and association of the past. Be this as it may, her books, her pictures,

CHAPTER III.

A BEAUTIFUL summer's day was drawing to a close. The sun had just sunk below the headlands of the distant hills, and the first deep shades of twilight were advancing gradually over the sky, while a spirit of quiet and repose stole almost imperceptibly over the earth. Not a sound, save the low murmuring of the distant streamlet, or the occasional carol of a weary bird as it wended its flight towards its accustomed roost, disturbed the death-like silence which everywhere prevailed. Nature, like man, weary and oppressed, seemed ready for repose—and anxious to lay down her head on the quiet and revivifying lap of night. Beautiful, indeed, is it to go forth at such an hour amongst the green fields and blossoming hedge-rows—to ramble to and fro in solitude

and quiet—indulging the heart's most secret and cherished thoughts, and conjuring back the pleasant memories of long ago. It is at such an hour perhaps, above all others, that the influence of the external world is most powerfully and beneficially felt; the mind, yielding to the impression from without, borrows, whatever may be its state, somewhat at least of the universal quietude and repose. Hear what the poet says—for, after all, your true poets are the best authorities on such matters—and few, perhaps, better than him from whom we quote—William Motherwell:

“ Oh God ! this is an holy hour :
Thy breath is o'er the land ;
I feel it in each little flower
Around me where I stand—
In every dew-bead glistening sheen,
In every leaf and blade of green—
And in this silence grand and deep,
Wherein thy blessed creatures sleep.”

The inhabitants of the little hamlet which
lay within the precincts of Temple-Thorpe,

were for the most part a-bed and asleep long ago ; and it was only here and there that an occasional straggler might be seen loitering along the path leading from the hostelry towards his own home, having indulged somewhat longer than usual in the witching potations of John Barleycorn, and the society of the gossip-loving Boniface. Amongst these was an old man of some fifty-five years of age, whom one would have thought from his appearance would have preferred the quiet of his own cottage hearth to the noise and bustle of a public assembly. Not so, however. Old Frank Hartwell was a man of too much importance amongst his neighbours to absent himself from their society whenever an opportunity occurred of his sharing it, which usually happened about six nights out of seven in every week ; for every night, Sunday night only excepted, might old Frank have been found at his post in the tap-room of the village hostelry. It must not, however, be thought that he was an intemperate or a dissipated character ; he



had one measure for all occasions, and that by no means an excessive one, and there he took his stand. A couple of pipes of tobacco and one pint of honest Boniface's home-brewed ale, constituted the sum total of Frank's nightly expenditure, and we verily believe, as he himself used to say, "The de'il himself would have hard work to tempt him to go beyond it." It is strange enough, however, that this very night the old man had broken through his resolution—his one pint had been multiplied into two, and had it not been that the lateness of the hour began to call away his companions one after another until he was left alone, it is more than probable that he would not have been contented even with these. What could be the meaning of this sudden change? Boniface was staggered with astonishment when old Frank called for his pint to be replenished, but he was a wise man, and too much alive to his own interest to make any remark; such, however, was not the case with the guests; one and all uttered an ex-

clamation of surprise, and some even ventured so far as to jeer the old man on his intemperance; while one, a stout jovial-looking fellow, and by far the youngest man of the party, hazarded a still more pointed remark, and congratulated him on his really having at last become "hale fellow well met." Old Frank gravely shook his head, laid down his pipe for a moment upon the table, and then turning and addressing himself to the last speaker, said in a slow but somewhat indistinct tone, "Mat, Mat, thou art a good natured lad, an' would be the last i' the world to say aught that might hurt an old man's feelings. I know thou meant it not—but, don't lad, don't joke me. Many and many a time I've said the de'il himself couldn't tempt me to drink more than one pint of ale a-night, but what the de'il can't do grief and vexation may, an' does sometimes accomplish. Its here, lad, here"—and Frank laid his hand on his heart, "an' for the life of me I can't help it." No one, after this ventured to question the old man

further on the subject ; he was evidently sad and dispirited ; and his friends, one and all, prompted by that innate feeling of delicacy which is so often found to exist in the breasts of the most unlearned and uneducated men, in a degree not at all inferior to those who are in a position far above them, remained silent, or hazarded only such general remarks as could have no reference to the condition of their companion.

Frank Hartwell was born and had lived from childhood to old age on the estate of Temple-Thorpe. He had been in the service of its former owner up to the time of his death, and after the happening of that event, he had elected voluntarily to follow the fortunes, and to ally himself to the reduced establishment of his widow, rather than to enter into the employment of its new master, Mr. Percival André Belmont, towards whom, by the way, it may at once be as well to observe, he entertained no very respectful—much less very friendly—feeling. A long and faithful servitude had placed him in that familiar position

with the family, which tried and good servants are so apt to obtain. He had sufficient good sense, however, never to forget his own place, nor to be guilty of any neglect of duty. The only license old Frank ever took was a most extraordinary liberty of speech. He always said what he thought, and was ever the first to take up arms against any one who might venture to say a word that might in the most remote degree reflect upon the character of his employers. The Widow Belmont and her son Walter were, in his estimation, the only two people in the country really worthy of the name of gentleness; the only two people whom, in fact, he would care to serve. And that he was sincere, in this last opinion, at all events, may be safely taken for granted, inasmuch as it was generally known that old Frank had been a prudent and money-saving man in his younger days, and might have retired from service and have lived upon the produce of his savings some years ago, had he been so minded. On the removal of the widow Belmont to the Abbey Cottage, he



had been installed into the office of gardener, and in this capacity, notwithstanding his advanced years, he acted up to this very day. All, however, who had known him previous to that time could not fail to observe the change which that sad event had wrought upon his temper and disposition. He suddenly became gloomy and dispirited, and might occasionally be heard talking to himself in a rambling and incoherent manner; but never were even his most intimate companions able to draw from him the secret of his trouble and dissatisfaction. The most that could ever be gathered from him, was a few words to this effect: "It's no matter," said he, "I know what frets and bothers me well enough, but there's no help for it; therefore I may as well bide quietly, as kick up a stir and frustration: it would do no good, no good whatever, and might only vex and harass those who have been vexed and harassed enough already. The lawyer says it's all right and according to law, but I'll be d——d if it's justice." And whenever

Frank Hartwell came out with an oath, everybody who knew him knew well that it was no common or trifling matter that annoyed him. This manifest disinclination to obtrude the secret cause of his grief on others had served effectually to allay that prying curiosity which might, and would in all probability, under other circumstances, have made it matter of public notoriety long ago. Never before the evening in question had old Frank Hartwell been heard voluntarily to speak of his troubles, and it was evident that even then he did so to save himself from further bantering and annoyance, rather than from any desire to enlist the sympathy of his friends.

On leaving the village hostelry, the old man, instead of proceeding directly towards his own home, turned into a narrow by-path which diverged from the hamlet across three or four small meadows, and ran directly over the brow of a steep thickly-wooded hillock, from which might be seen, at a single glance, the mansion and park of Temple-Thorpe,



the Abbey, and the Abbey-Cottage. From this point, perhaps, above all others, one had the most artistic and delightful view to be met with on the whole estate. The landscape was perfect, and required but the pencil of a Claude Lorrain to have invested it with immortality. It was while gazing on this scene, that Frank Hartwell, though still sad and dispirited, became imperceptibly influenced by the quiet stillness and death-like repose of the hour. Harsh words died upon his lips—bitter thoughts passed quickly from his heart. His grief, though nothing abated, took a higher and more purified character. He had been standing, gazing upon the landscape, and chewing the cud of his melancholy reflections, for some few minutes, when the sound of a light step fell upon his ear, and the next moment his young master, Walter Belmont, was seen ascending the opposite side of the hill, and ere the old man had time to retire, as his first impulse would have led him to have done, he had been hailed and recognized.

“Why, Frank, I should have thought, at your age, and especially after a hard day’s work, you would have preferred a soft bed and a comfortable sleep to a moonlight ramble,” said Walter, at the same time placing his hand familiarly on the old man’s shoulder.

“True, Master Walter, true! It is very natural you should think so; but happening to be out somewhat later than usual, and often having come up here aforetime, to take as it were a bird’s-eye view of this bonny picture, when every head in the hamlet but my own was resting upon its pillow, and every eye, save mine, was closed in sleep, I could not withstand the temptation. Old men, Master Walter, do not like to give up old habits.”

At this moment the moon, which for the last half hour had been slowly and gradually emerging from the dark clouds which curtained the distant horizon, shed her bright beams upon the earth and clothed the landscape in a flood of light. Walter Belmont

gazed upon the scene, and exclaimed, "You are right, Frank, it is a noble picture, and well repays one the trouble of an extra hour's watching. I have never before seen the mansion to such advantage."

"Yea, yea—it is a grand place, Master, a grand place—and I warrant me there will be grand doings there too, on the morrow."

"Why so, Frank?"

"What! an' don't you know, Master Walter, why half the gentlefolks of this county, an' it may be of the next county too, for aught I know to the contrary, are to be assembled together and to have a grand entertainment at Mr. Belmont's expense, eh?"

"No, that I do not, Frank?"

"Why then, Sir, perhaps I oughtn't to tell you, as Mr. Belmont doubtless intends to take you by surprise. But the fact is, your cousin Miss Marian, will be of age to-morrow—and a fair good creature she is—too good to be cooped up with those who have latterly had the management of her—but no matter, no matter—that's not my

business, an' I'll say no more about it. You will see her, Master Walter, and may judge for yourself. There will be rare doings—rare doings, no doubt, to celebrate her coming of age." And the old man shook his head somewhat sadly.

"I fear, Frank, I shall not have the pleasure of meeting my fair cousin so soon as you appear to imagine; and after your account of her, I cannot but feel sensible that I have good reason to regret that this should happen to be the case," replied Walter Belmont.

"What, then," exclaimed the old man, fixing his eyes on the face of his young master: "What, then, you are not going there, after all—nor your mother either, Master Walter, eh?"

"We are not, Frank."

"Well, well; I do not wonder at it—perhaps it is best to stay away. Ye could have but little pleasure there now. An' as for my poor mistress—"

"Your mistress, like myself, Frank, is

wholly ignorant of the contemplated festivities at Temple-Thorpe. Had we been asked to have joined the party, the respect we owe to my uncle would certainly have induced us to have done so ; as it is, however, we must be content to remain away."

"An' look on, like the rest of us," exclaimed the old man, as the colour mounted to his cheeks. "Look on—while others, your own kith and kin, revel in your father's hall, and make your father's roof ring with laughter and merriment. Oh, Walter, Walter," and Frank, struggling with his feelings, grasped the hand of his young master within his own—"there was a time when I never expected to see this ; a time when I had hoped that you—but no matter, no matter—it has passed now, and there is no chance for us. Since the Squire's death everything has gone wrong."

"What mean you, Frank!" demanded Walter, startled and astonished at the old man's excitement.

"That I should die contented, could I

only see those in possession of Temple-Thorpe who have the most right to it," replied Frank seriously, "but that day, Master Walter, I fear will never come. *He* has it — *he* has it, now — and he will stick to it to the last. It may be all right by law, but I'll be d — if it's justice."

Without waiting for any reply, or uttering another word, Frank Hartwell turned quickly from his companion and retraced his steps towards the hamlet.

Walter Belmont, accustomed as he had long been to listen to the wild and incoherent ramblings of the old man, was startled and amazed; and every now and then, as he wended his way back again to the Abbey Cottage, he found himself almost mechanically asking, "What can it mean? Who can have a better title to Temple-Thorpe than my uncle?"

Conjuring back the memories of his early life, he had an indistinct recollection of a time when he, in fact, used to look upon the mansion as his home; but then, it was during

his father's lifetime, and while he himself was but a mere child. Young, however, as he might be at that time, a thousand little circumstances appeared at this moment to be revived in his remembrance, which seemed strangely enough to identify him with the person to whom old Frank Hartwell had so vaguely alluded. He remembered too, how, for months and months after they had removed to the Abbey Cottage, his mother, sorrow-stricken and oppressed, had refused to mingle in society, and even to receive the visits of any who might call upon her, save those of a few of her most intimate and dear friends. He fancied also that he had some recollection of certain rumours which were current in the neighbourhood at the time, but what they were, or to what they really tended, he had not the most distant idea. As the memories of early childhood are generally vague and indistinct, and often in after years when we seek to connect them into anything like a consistent and reasonable chain, aided as we may be by the few

startling and important events which have left an indelible impression upon the mind, we shall find how much we are compelled to draw upon the imagination. And after all, it not unfrequently happens that if truly tested there will be found a much greater measure of romance than reality, in the conclusion at which we may happen to arrive. Walter Belmont was fully persuaded of this important truth, but yet the old man's words had sunk into his heart and he could not pluck them out. Thoughts, feelings, imaginations—had been aroused, over which the reason seemed to have little or no control.

CHAPTER IV.

It was drawing towards midnight ere Walter Belmont reached home, his devoted parent, however, was still up and anxiously awaiting his return. The moment he entered the little sitting room she sprang forward to meet him, but no sooner had their eyes met than she read in his restless and anxious looks that something had occurred to disturb the usually quiet tenor of his mind. Her first impulse was that prompted by nature—to question the cause? But ere she had time to give expression to the thought a cloud gathered upon her brow, and shrinking from his glance, as though half afraid that he had guessed the feelings which were at that moment struggling within her heart, she sank back again upon her chair. For the first and last time Walter Belmont felt

something like suspicion steal across his mind. For a little while both were silent, or exchanged only a few words on common-place topics; topics, at that moment, alike uninteresting to them both. The Widow Belmont, however, was not the woman to lay her head upon her pillow without endeavouring to ascertain and alleviate, if possible, the cause of her child's disquietude. Already she repented of the weakness which had prevented her doing so in the first instance, more especially as she had no longer a doubt but that weakness had betrayed itself to her companion. Why should she hesitate? Could it be possible that any one had revealed that secret to her child which it had ever hitherto been one of the chief objects of her life to conceal from him? Be this as it might, it in fact mattered little. Much as the Widow Belmont would have wished to have been spared the recital of events, long ago passed by, and the recurrence to which must now necessarily awaken in her heart many sad and bitter agonies; she was pre-

pared, in case it should turn out that the time had arrived when the truth must be told, to tell it fearlessly and unshrinkingly. She had studied her son's nature too deeply to doubt for a moment the result. Blame her in secret and solitude, perhaps he might ; but taunt or upbraid her openly, that she was satisfied he would not.

"Walter," exclaimed she at length in a firm yet subdued tone, "pray tell me what has occurred to annoy you?"

"A mere trifle, dear mother, scarcely worth the trouble of reporting," replied he.

"Not so, my boy, I know you too well to believe that a mere trifle would thus have affected you. Come, speak out ; I have ever shared your confidence until now, and I hope there is no reason why I should not continue to do so?"

"No, mother, no, there is not," replied Walter, drawing his chair nearer to her side, and taking her hand affectionately within his own, "the fact is, I met, a little

while ago, that faithful and devoted old man, Frank Hartwell."

"Frank Hartwell," repeated the widow, and her cheek for the moment became deathly pale.

"Yes, Frank Hartwell," continued Walter, without noticing the effect his first announcement had produced, "and I have been foolish enough to give ear to his doting ramblings, and still more foolish in allowing them to have made any impression upon me."

"No, Walter, there you wrong *him* and yourself too. Frank Hartwell, it is true, is an old man, but he is not yet in his dotage; and whenever he ventures to counsel, be assured he does it in kindness and sincerity, and be assured also, there is often more wisdom than you may imagine in what he says. But tell me, Walter, of what has he been speaking?"

"Of Temple-Thorpe — my uncle, Mr. Belmont—and my fair cousin, Marian."

"Well—what of them?" demanded the widow, firmly.

"Know you not, mother, that on the morrow Marian will attain her majority; that the event is to be publicly celebrated, and that Temple-Thorpe is to be the scene of unparalleled festivity and rejoicing."

"No, Walter, I did not know it, and am sorry that you should have been the first to bring the intelligence. Whatever may be the opinion of your cousins—Reginald and Marian—of whom we can say nothing, inasmuch as we have neither of us seen them for some years, Mr. Belmont, at all events, might have remembered that you are one of his own kindred. It would have been but an act of common courtesy had he numbered *you* amongst his guests."

"True, mother, and you also.—Why should his brother's widow be slighted and cast off?" and a flush of indignation settled for a moment on his cheek.

"For myself, dear Walter, I care not. Under any circumstances, I believe, I shall

never again be induced to cross the threshold of Temple-Thorpe. *That* would, indeed, be a trial beyond my strength. But tell me, said not Frank Hartwell something more?"

"He did—and something which has puzzled and annoyed me beyond all the rest."

"What said he, Walter? come, do not hesitate."

"He said, mother," replied the young man, fixing his eyes earnestly on her face as he spoke, "He said that he should die contented could he only see those in possession of Temple-Thorpe who have the most right to it."

"Devoted old man!" exclaimed the widow, while the colour started to her cheeks—"Devoted old man—he has ever been faithful! Walter, I firmly believe him—but, alas! there is little—nay, there is no chance, that his wish will ever be gratified."

"But who, my dear mother, can have better right to the estate than he who now enjoys it? Pray tell me, does not

my uncle hold it by a legal and unquestionable title."

"He does."

"Then, who can have any just reason to complain?"

"What! has Frank Hartwell told you all, and yet left you in ignorance on that, the most important, particular?"

For a few moments both were silent.

"Walter," at length resumed the heart-stricken mother, "I feel the time has now arrived when I must speak to you of circumstances and events, passed many years ago—which have wrought your ruin—and it may be, you may think, when you have heard them—*my* shame. Be this, however, as it may, you shall know all, providing such be your desire."

"No — no, tell me only," exclaimed Walter, startled by the agonized expression of his mother's countenance, "who has the most right to Temple-Thorpe?"

"You, Walter Belmont!" replied she vehemently; "It was your father's property,

and ought, at his death, in justice to have descended to his child. Yes, instead of living as we are in the Abbey Cottage — the mere tenants at will of your proud uncle — the mansion ought now, as it was formerly, to have been our home — and the thousand broad acres by which it is surrounded should have been in your hands."

"Mother!" exclaimed Walter, "What mean you? What am I to understand by this statement?"

"That had it not been for your parent's crime."

"Crime?"

"No, no, Walter — not crime, I was wrong in using that word: Had it not been for your parent's fault (I should have said) a fault over which I have in secret wept and lamented for many, many years, you might at this moment have been the owner of Temple-Thorpe. Your father, dear Walter, erred as much, or perhaps, more even than myself — yet at the time we were alike ignorant of our error. He — he — married his — "

But ere the Widow had time to conclude her sentence, she fell swooning upon the bosom of her child.

Walter Belmont, horror-stricken and alarmed, pressed her closely to his heart—and bitterly repented his curiosity.

“Oh, God!” exclaimed he, as he gazed on her pale cheeks, “what, what have I done? It was cruel, very cruel, to tax her feelings thus.”

A little while, and the Widow’s consciousness returned. On slowly opening her eyes, the first object she recognized was the face of her sorrowing son. He was gazing passionately, sorrowfully upon her, and she read at a glance the bitter anguish that was rending his heart.

“Bear, bear with me a little longer, dear Walter, and I will tell you all,” murmured she, pressing his fevered and trembling hand tightly within her own. “It is a bitter trial—but—but—my duty ——”

“No, mother,” interposed Walter vehemently, “say no more. I cannot, will

not bear it. Forgive me, forgive me, having caused you this affliction. From this night never let the subject be mentioned again ; and let us, as far as it may be possible, bury every remembrance of what has passed between us this night in oblivion. Come, come, promise me you will do so."

The Widow, with a strong effort, raised herself upon her feet, threw her arms around his neck, and with her head pillowed upon his bosom, wept like a child. The flood-gates of feeling were unbarred, and every tear that trickled down her cheek eased the bitter agony of her over-burdened heart. Few, indeed, but those who have suffered deeply—those who have felt the agonizing tortures of overwhelming grief—can form a true conception of the luxury of tears.

"Walter," resumed she faintly, after a little while, "do you—do you really wish that I should say no more?"

"Yes, yes, mother," replied he ; "and let me beseech you to grant my request." And there was too much truthfulness in his

countenance at that moment to admit of doubt.

“Well, perhaps you have decided wisely. Think not, however, Walter, that in yielding to your entreaty I am seeking to spare myself. Far otherwise, could the revelation I have yet to make in any way tend to promote your happiness, or increase your welfare, believe me, oh! believe me, Walter, I would make it now, and freely, even though my heart should burst in the conflict.”

Walter Belmont replied not, but the soft sweet smile that settled upon his cheek spoke far more eloquently than words, and gave more assurance to the mother's heart than the warmest protestation he could have uttered, of the full and implicit confidence he had in her assertion.

“You now know, Walter,” resumed she, “the main fact as regards yourself. You know what you are—what you might have been. A bitter knowledge it is, too, for one so young in years. Henceforth, you will find it a hard matter, and it will cost you

the festival was made. Old and young, rich and poor, were indiscriminately mixed together. If we might judge, however, from the contemptuous smile, the sarcastic sneer, which many a young blonde (as she drowsily reclined upon the well-stuffed cushions of her carriage) cast upon the less fortunate—though none the less lovely—occupant of some meaner vehicle, as it halted for a moment by her own, there was but little sympathy, but little friendly feeling, between them. It is a broad line, a mystical rubicon, which divides the rich and the poor! Here, even at a moment when all alike were bent upon the same object, when every bosom was stirred by the same impulse, that old and damnable sin, “pride of heart,” was strong and active as ever. No matter! This was no occasion for picking quarrels or fomenting differences, and the peer’s daughter and the farmer’s child, whatever might be their feelings or their thoughts, must be contented, for a time at least, to travel side by side, chewing the cud of their own reflec-

tions, as best suited them. After all, as one high dame—a certain Lady Sniffington!—casting her eyes over that motley crowd, observed, “La, Sniffington, how could you be so absurd as to accept Belmont’s invitation to this birth-day fête? I expected how it would be, and you know very well if I had only been allowed to have had *my* way in the matter, we should have declined it at once. It is positively shocking to have one’s daughters ogled and stared at by such vulgar hoydens! Now look at Jemima’s bonnet. Is it not a love of a bonnet? The most exquisite little thing Madame C—— ever turned out. There’s not another of the kind in the county, and yet I’ll be bound we shall see every gawky girl disporting herself in one of the same pattern at church next Sunday. — Such low-bred vulgar people—I detest them! They always ape their betters, and set themselves up as though they had as much right to be distingué as the best of us.”

Lord Sniffington, a good, easy kind of

man, never troubled himself to answer his lady, neither shall we. Her remark will go for as much as it is worth, and will, in all probability, form an apter illustration of her Ladyship's character than anything we could have written upon the subject. Lady Sniffington, though but one of a class, was a faithful portraiture of many.

There were great doings, grand doings at Temple-Thorpe. Aye, and despite all the endeavours of the host to provide for the wants and amusements of his visitors of every rank, there were great heart-burnings, great bickerings and discontent.

Leaving the visitors, however, indulging to their heart's content in revelry and mirth, backbiting and scandal, as best suiteth them, we will at once direct our attention to one or two of the more important characters of our story.

In a small room, overlooking the park, and from which might be had a full view of the motley cavalcade we have above described, sat Mr. Belmont and his daughter ; the for-

mer grave, gloomy, and evidently much out of humour ; the latter sad, sorrowful, and dejected. Marian, decked out in her holiday attire, was looking, if possible, more lovely and bewitching than ever, and the melancholy expression of her countenance served to heighten, rather than otherwise, the interest which her surpassing loveliness was calculated to inspire. Mr. Belmont, however, was manifestly too much fretted and annoyed to have any eye either to his daughter's beauty or dejection.

" I must insist, Marian," said he, after a brief pause in their conversation, " that my wishes on this subject be implicitly obeyed. As you are aware, my chief object in giving this day's fête was that you might have an opportunity of becoming more intimately acquainted with young Lord Lindsay, who, as I have just told you, has already spoken to me respecting you in such high terms of commendation that I cannot for a moment doubt the true state of his feelings towards you. Rest assured you will only have

yourself to blame, if you do not, ere you have seen another birth-day, become Lady Lindsay—a position, mark you, which many girls of much higher birth, and with far greater worldly prospects than yourself, would readily make any sacrifice to attain.”

“Even be it so, father,” replied Marian, firmly, though in a softened and subdued voice, “even be it so, I do not envy them their feelings, much less shall I ever envy them their greatness, if it should so happen they prove successful in winning the affections of his Lordship. I cannot, I will not, rival them in their endeavours.”

“Marian!” exclaimed Mr. Belmont, rising angrily from his chair, and pacing two or three times hurriedly across the room, “Marian, there is a spirit of obstinacy and self-will manifested in your conduct which I can neither tolerate nor endure. I tell you——”

“No, no, dear father,” interposed the young girl, springing to his side and grasping his trembling hand warmly within her own, “do not say I am obstinate, do not say

I am self-willed. Did I ever, on any other subject than this, venture to hazard my opinion in opposition to your own? Did I ever, by word or look, manifest the slightest disinclination to obey your commands, however much they may have been opposed to my own wishes, to my own happiness. But now——”

“Now, at all events, you seem determined to throw off your allegiance,” replied Mr. Belmont, bitterly.

“No, no! God forbid that I should ever forget my duty to my father. But, oh! listen, listen to me but for one moment, and then, then, dispose of me as you please. I cannot, I do not love Lord Lindsay, and were I to promise to favour his suit, to become his wife, what would be the result? I should make utter shipwreck of my own happiness, and should be guilty of such base deception towards him that I should forfeit, both in the eyes of God and man, every claim and title I possess to the name of woman. A perjured wife! No, no, I will never be that.”

"Tush! tush! Marian," replied Mr. Belmont, startled and somewhat softened by his daughter's energy. "Tush, tush! This is but the romantic raving of a child, and wholly unworthy of a woman. I gave you credit for possessing more worldly-wisdom; but no matter, time and experience will convince you of your error. Remember, girl, whatever may be your present opinions respecting Lord Lindsay, however much you may think at this moment you see in him to object to and condemn; remember, I say, he can bestow upon you those things which will more than cover his multitude of sins, be they never so great—wealth, rank, honour!"

"And do you think, father, these would suffice to secure your daughter's happiness? No, no; I do not, I cannot believe you would have me sacrifice myself on so base, so despicable, and, above all, on so hazardous a shrine."

"Marian," replied Mr. Belmont, again assuming his former stern and inflexible manner, "Marian, this trifling is wholly unbearable. In seeking to unite you to Lord

Lindsay, I am seeking only to place you in a position of which any woman might feel justly proud, to link your fortunes with one whose immense wealth will, at all times and under all circumstances, secure for you that consideration and respect which none but the children of Mammon can ever safely rely upon. Gold—gold alone is the talisman by which alone we are enabled to subdue all things to ourselves. Tell me no more—tell me no more, I say, of your not loving Lord Lindsay. Love! love! 'tis an idle word, fit only for a child's vocabulary! What matter though you love not his Lordship for himself; believe me, Marian, you will soon learn to love him for his possessions."

"No, father," exclaimed the young girl vehemently, as she proudly drew up her fragile figure to its full height, and fixed her dark eyes firmly on his face. "No, never, never!"

"Now, mark me, Marian," said Mr. Belmont, fiercely grasping his daughter by the arm as he spoke, "I have no further

time to trifle with you. I had hoped our interview would have been less stormy—your temper less obstinate and perverse. As I have already intimated, Lord Lindsay has spoken to me respecting you. Now, know the truth. He was the first this morning to congratulate me on your having attained your majority, and at the same time he solicited your hand in marriage.”

“And you—you—” shrieked Marian.

“I did that, Marian, which every father, having a true knowledge of the world, and having also a due regard for his daughter’s future welfare, would have done, —I promised him you should be his—his wife! And now, I have only to tell you that that promise must be fulfilled; that *my* word must be kept.”

Mr. Belmont, without waiting for a reply, hurried from the room; while Marian, startled and overpowered by his sudden and appalling intelligence, sank down upon a chair, and wept bitterly.

And who, and what, was Lord Lindsay?

Lord Lindsay, by birth as well as by edu-



cation, was a thorough aristocrat ; and might truly boast of as many quarterings in his coat of arms as the first nobleman in the realm. He was a man of fashion—a leader of ton—a bon vivant—and far, far above all else—he was the owner of one of the most compact and beautiful estates in the county, and might boast of a clear rent-roll of from sixty to seventy thousand pounds per annum. This latter acquisition alone was sufficient to clothe him, as far as society generally was concerned, with an inexpressible interest and importance. Notwithstanding all his advantages, there was that about him which rendered him (as we have already shewn) anything but an object of admiration and regard to the pure and high-minded Marian Belmont. Lord Lindsay was an arrant coxcomb — conceited, vain, frivolous, and pedantic ! He was the very man to cheat and cozen the fancy of a gay blonde—a fashionable coquette—or a purely mercenary woman—but he had few charms or attractions for those who, like Marian Belmont, admired and revered.

only—a true and genuine nobility of heart and intellect. A pure, noble, high-minded woman, rarely places her affections on a being inferior to herself; the very instincts of her nature teach her to look upon man as a creature born to counsel and direct. Nor does she, by so doing, at all detract from her own worth—her own dignity.

Marian Belmont was a thorough woman—possessed of the highest attributes of her sex; and Lord Lindsay, notwithstanding all his wealth, all his greatness, was no fitting match for Marian Belmont!

CHAPTER VI.

WHILE the scene, we have just described, was passing between Mr. Belmont and his daughter, another of a very different, though of a no less remarkable character, was being enacted in the billiard room attached to the mansion.

Reginald Belmont and the youthful Lord Lindsay were engaged at play.

"Egad, Reginald," drawled his companion, as he noted the last masterly stroke of his rival's ball, "you are in high feather this morning. You seem to have got a certain old gentleman's luck as well as your own."

"A mere chance, Lindsay—a mere chance! As you well know I am no match for you in a general way."

"'Pon my soul, I don't think you are,

and yet you have got the advantage over me, some how or other, just now."

Lord Lindsay again took his place at the table ; but, despite his endeavours to assume a cool and unembarrassed manner, it was evident he was labouring under no slight or ordinary excitement. His small, dark eyes were lit up with a restless and anxious expression—his cheeks pale—and his hand, as he hesitated for a moment ere he levelled his cue against the ball, shook with agitation. Reginald Belmont was thoroughly acquainted with the character of his companion, and failed not to observe the true state of his feelings. A harsh cynical smile passed across his face, and the next moment its expression was cold, calm, and unimpassioned as usual.

"By all that's unfortunate, you're done again, Lindsay !" exclaimed he, as his Lordship, having played his last stroke, threw down his cue angrily upon the table. "Never man had such a run of ill-luck. One—two—three games in succession—and beaten in all ! The thing is incredible, and would not be believed at C——'s or W——'s."



“True, Reginald,—very true. *There*, at all events, I generally carry everything before me. It was only last week, that I beat the Marquis of K—— to my heart’s content, and walked off with a few cool hundreds in less time than it would have taken a Beau Brummel, to have arranged the fashion of his neck-tie ! But I’ll be — if I can strike a single ball this morning. Our last night’s revel has thoroughly unmanned me ; and I have no more command over my game, than the veriest tyro that ever took cue in hand.”

“Say rather, Lindsay, Dame Fortune has grown coquettish, and ‘weary of her old love, is laying her snares for a new ;’” replied Reginald, throwing himself carelessly on one of the luxurious couches, which were placed, here and there, throughout the room.

“Well, have it so, if you please. At the very best of times she is a confounded jilt, and the support of her whims and vagaries runs away with more cash than half-a-year’s ordinary expenditure. Now, let me see,” and Lord Lindsay, taking a small crimson

morocco case from his pocket, began to count out a number of bank-notes upon the table: "Let me see—one, two, three, four hundred."

"Thank you, good friend, mine!" replied Reginald, springing from the couch, and transferring the notes to his own pocket; "thank you.—You have made a bad morning's work, Lindsay, but —"

"But," interposed his Lordship, sharply, "I will redeem myself ere night."

And without further parley, the youthful gamesters left the room. One evidently elated with his success, the other angered and annoyed by his unusual ill-luck.

It is a startling and melancholy fact, that gambling, to a vast number of the aristocracy of this country, has become the most common and fashionable amusement. It is a source to which they frequently, in the first instance, fly solely *pour passer le temps*,—but which, when indulged in to any great length, soon becomes one of the most important avocations of life. A man seldom remains a gamester for any length of time,

merely for the sake of the amusement and excitement attendant upon gambling: play, in itself, is well enough as far as it goes, but one may be pretty well assured, that by far the greater majority of those who are regularly in the habit of attending the gaming-table, look upon play merely as a means to an end. It would boast but few attractions as a pastime, were it not for the delusive hope it holds out of great and rapid gain to its votaries. Gold, gold! is here, as elsewhere, the mystic spell, that tempts man within the vortex, and hurries him on to his own ruin and destruction. Nor is gambling—this fashionable vice of the age—confined solely to men. With sorrow and shame be it said, that women of the highest rank, of the most liberal education, are not unfrequently found pursuing it with a degree of avidity and anxiety, that would of itself be sufficient to satisfy even the most cursory observer, that they are influenced by a much stronger, as well as by a much more selfish and ignoble motive, than the mere desire for amusement.

There is something inexpressibly shocking, in the fact of man devoting himself to a vice so sad and demoralizing ; but how much more shocking and repulsive is it to contemplate woman in the same character, to see her prostituting her time and her talents to the same base purposes.

We have seldom known a woman, who has once passionately devoted herself to gambling, who has not ever afterwards displayed an utter want of all those feminine and gentle attributes which ever characterize and adorn a good wife and an affectionate mother. Oh, that we could but induce others to look upon this pernicious—this dangerous custom, with the same horror and disgust as ourselves ; we feel well assured that there would then, indeed, be but few men—certainly no women—found to countenance or tolerate it.

Lord Lindsay, though far from what the world would call a professed gamester, was nevertheless so strongly infected by the spirit of one, and had, at one time or another, indulged so frequently in its exercise that he



had long ago ceased to look upon play as a mere amusement; in fact, he had arrived at that stage when play became an amusement only in proportion to the stake dependent upon the result.

Hence arose the perturbation that had manifested itself in his conduct during the progress of the game he had just concluded with Reginald Belmont. Four hundred pounds, it is true, was but a mere trifle to one of his immense wealth; but who shall say how many four hundred pounds, during the progress of the last few weeks, had been dissipated in the same way? He was, as we have already remarked, an arrant coxcomb and filled with vanity, and as such, though ever first to babble of and blazon forth his own victories, he but seldom, if ever, alluded to his misfortunes.

On leaving the billiard room, Lord Lindsay was proceeding directly towards his own apartments, but scarcely had he separated from his companion and entered a vast corridor, which ran from one end of the building to

the other, and which formed the mode of communication to all the principal or state rooms in the mansion, when he suddenly beheld Mr. Belmont, with hurried and agitated steps, coming towards him. From the look of astonishment with which that gentleman regarded him, it was clearly evident, however, that the meeting was unpremeditated ; and if we might form an opinion from the confused and agitated manners, as well of the host as of his noble visitor, it was alike unpleasant and inopportune to both.

Lord Lindsay, quickly recovering his self-possession, was the first to speak.

“ And how is the fair Marian this morning ? If I mistake not, Mr. Belmont, you have but a moment ago left her apartment.”

“ True, my Lord ; and I am glad to say she is well as usual, though somewhat out of spirits. It may be that the thoughts of to-day’s festival alarms her,” replied Mr. Belmont, hurriedly.

“ No ! no, Sir ! Depend upon it women are not so soon scared as you imagine, espe-

cially with the prospect of gay fêtes, mad revels, or masqueradings. Why, I would venture no small wager that they are the things above all others calculated to enliven, rather than to depress, the spirits of ninety and nine women out of every hundred."

"It may be that your Lordship's opinion is the correct one," said Mr. Belmont, evidently wishful to get away, "for, after all, old man as I am, I am but little versed in the whims and caprices of a woman's humour."

"But tell me," and Lord Lindsay laid his hand familiarly upon Mr. Belmont's arm, and lowered his voice as he spoke, "Did you make known to her all my good wishes? Did you intimate anything of my proposal, eh?"

"I did, my Lord—and——"

"And she received it favourably?" inquired his Lordship, eagerly.

"Why, perhaps, I ought not to say so much as that. But—but, as you are aware, my Lord, Marian is young, too young, in fact, fully to appreciate the honour you would confer upon her. Doubtless, in a

little while, when she has seen more of your Lordship, and has become better acquainted with the world, she will think very differently."

"Then, am I to understand that my suit for the present is altogether rejected?" demanded Lord Lindsay, in a somewhat sharp and bitter voice, a heightened flush at the same moment flashing suddenly across his cheek.

"No, no! assuredly not, my Lord, assuredly not," replied Mr. Belmont warmly, "I fear I have not made myself clearly understood. My daughter's scruples and objections are such only as every woman, especially of her youthful age, would make under similar circumstances. It may be, and in fact I doubt not but, after all, the truth really is, that Marian, influenced by a feeling of false delicacy, has spoken with more coyness than the promptings of her heart would by any means have justified. It is impossible that any woman, having a due regard for her own happiness and welfare, could so summarily have

disposed of your Lordship's honourable proposals ! A little attention, a few well-timed compliments, and——”

“ And all the other et ceteras of a season of wooing,” interposed his Lordship, “ and you think I may hope to succeed in the end. Is it so ?”

“ Yea ; I would stake my whole estate on the result. It must be so.” “ And it *shall* be so,” Mr. Belmont would have added had he been addressing any other than Lord Lindsay.

“ Well, after all, perhaps Marian is right. Man is apt to place but little store on a prize too readily and easily obtained. Be assured, Mr. Belmont, I will endeavour to benefit by your information.”

And while Mr. Belmont hastened away to rejoin his visitors, his Lordship passed on towards his own room.

Never before, perhaps, had the overweening vanity of the young nobleman received so startling and severe a shock ; that his suit should not have been at once gladly ac-

cepted appeared to him sufficiently wonderful; but that it should have been rejected, (and such, despite Mr. Belmont's assertion to the contrary, he was inclined to believe was the fact,) was wholly incomprehensible. He had never for a moment imagined that the pretty, warm-hearted, and highly accomplished Marian Belmont could entertain even the most remote objection to becoming Lady Lindsay. How many ladies, young, pretty, and warm-hearted ladies too, were there, who would, at that moment, have given anything—everything, indeed—to have had the same offer made to them as had been made to Miss Belmont. Lord Lindsay, unless he had been wilfully blind or woefully stupid, could not be ignorant that such was the case; but, however flattering it was to his vanity, it had but little claim upon his serious attention. He loved only—or, perhaps, we should speak more correctly were we to say, he *admired* only—Marian Belmont, and he had no thought or care for another. He was bitterly chagrined, and half inclined to be

highly indignant at the manner in which his proposals had been received, but a little reflection convinced him that such a line of conduct would be calculated wholly to mar, or at all events to weaken the chances of his ultimate success. He determined, therefore, to subdue every feeling of anger and resentment, and to play the suitor in sober and serious earnestness ; and so wholly bent upon and occupied was his mind with this object, that ere another hour had rolled away, every remembrance of the morning's ill-luck and the loss of his four hundred pounds had passed from his mind.

He had no longer a thought about redeeming his money, but was now bent, heart and soul, upon winning the hand of his mistress.

It was a far higher, a much nobler prize !

CHAPTER VII.

THE village hostelry, as may readily be supposed, was entirely deserted on the day in question ; its usual frequenters having, together with their more sober and thrifty neighbours, one and all, gone off to Temple-Thorpe to partake of its good cheer, and to enjoy, as best suited them, the amusements of the festival, for Mr. Belmont's hospitality had extended itself on this occasion to the lowliest labourers on his estate. For them, and certain others of his guests in the same class and position of life, a special banquet had been provided, and was served under two large marquées fixed at a short distance from the mansion.

We are wrong, however, in saying that the hostelry was *entirely* deserted.

At an early hour of the day, old Frank Hartwell had taken his seat in his usual corner of

the parlour, and there he sat, hour after hour, with a long clay pipe in his mouth, puff, puff, puff, and every now and then sending forth a volume of smoke, sufficient for the time to envelope his rubicund face as it were in a cloud. His own favourite pewter mug stood on the table by his side, but its contents were seldom tasted. It was evident that Frank was in no humour for drinking; smoking and building castles in the air constituted the old man's chief amusement for that day. The house dog was laid at his feet upon the hearth, and sleeping and snoring to its heart's content. Frank looked upon the poor brute every now and then, and sighed heavily; then he would mutter a few words to himself, dash the dust from his pipe, and the next moment he was hard at work as ever, puff, puff, puff, puff, and sending out the smoke again in every direction.

It would be no easy matter to chronicle the various subjects that occupied the old man's thoughts as he sat there in that quiet room, hour after hour; to tell how many

memories, how many bright associations of the past, flitted across his mind, nor how many wild projects and delusive hopes he formed for the future. Suffice it to say that, after all, the old man's day dream was very sad and gloomy, and many a time was he compelled to brush the tears, as they rose unbidden, from his cheek. And yet it was not for himself alone that Frank Hartwell sorrowed thus deeply. His day was nearly worn out, and he should have but few wants more on this side the grave. There were those, however, (the Widow Belmont and her son,) who were dear to the old man as his own kith and kin, and to whom life presented a much wider and more extended range. Years, many years, it was only fair and reasonable to suppose, were still before them, ere they should be taken away from the cark and care of the world; and what would be their fortunes, their destinies? He remembered how, in years gone by, he had seen them among the first and noblest of the land, few so beloved, none more worthy! He remembered too, for how much of his own

good fortune in life he was himself indebted to them, and more especially to *him*, his good kind master, whose ashes were now mouldering in the grave. Yes, the old man remembered these things, all, all, as though they had been daguerreotypes upon his heart. *They* had been *his* friends in the hour of their fortune, and old, worn-out, and decrepit as he was, he would gladly have given up the last farthing of his little, long-garnered store, could he but now, in their day of affliction and distress, have carried comfort and consolation to their humble home.

“What? what can be done?” mentally ejaculated that old man, for at least the hundredth time, but to no purpose; he was puzzled and perplexed as before; and, for at least the hundredth time, that old man again exclaimed, “No, no; they will never go back to Temple-Thorpe, never!—Well, it may be law, but I’ll be d—d if it’s justice.” And, apparently somewhat soothed by the very utterance of his own opinion on the matter, he would, on each occasion, again take his

pipe between his lips, and start, puff, puff, puff, puffing faster than ever.

Towards the conclusion of the old man's lucubrations, however, some new and happy thought seemed suddenly to fix itself upon his mind. His dark, deep-sunken, grey eye grew suddenly bright, and lighted up with animation, while a smile, indicative of hope and satisfaction, gradually stole over his face. For the ensuing five or ten minutes he puffed away at a most terrific rate, as though he was inhaling, with every whiff of the mystic weed, increased mental strength and inspiration. What a glorious subject would old Frank Hartwell have been for the pencil of a Rembrandt, or a Teniers, at that moment !

"Ay, ay," exclaimed he, at length, rising from his chair, placing his pipe upon the table, and taking two or three turns across the room, "Ay, ay, it is a lucky thought ! and what a stupid old fool I must have been, never to have hit upon it before. Should it be as I suspect—should the wedding have been all right, and Walter Belmont, after all,

prove to be — Ay, ay, I see it clear enough now, it's all right—it's all right ! and they will go back to Temple-Thorpe again. Talk of your fêtes, and your festivals, but wont we then have a fête and festival, too ? Egad, old as I am, I'll foot it on the green with the best of them."

And the old man, carried away by the warmth of his feelings, danced round the room with all the energy, though but little of the agility of a school-boy, knocking over tables, chairs, and sundry articles of domestic garniture in the course of his pirouettes. The drowsy house-dog suddenly started from its quiet slumbers, sprang upon its feet, uttered a most dissonant howl, and then suddenly bolted from the room, barking and yelling at the top of its voice. Puffing and out of breath, with the exertion this strange scene had cost him, the old man sank down again upon his chair, and his hand mechanically sought the table and the pipe. The table, however, had been overturned, and the pipe was laying, broken into a dozen fragments,

on the ground. A cloud passed over the old man's face, and he became, for the moment, manifestly ashamed of having given way to his feelings, in a manner so unnatural to his years. "Ay, ay," exclaimed he, again rising from his seat, and busying himself with replacing everything in its proper order, "I am an old fool after all; and yet, if,—if I can only manage to set all right again at Temple-Thorpe, I don't think I shall be such an old fool, either."

And how were the Widow Belmont and her noble, though stricken-hearted boy, beguiling the weary hours of this sad day?

Not in the indulgence of fruitless sorrow and lamentation! not in painful murmurings and upbraidings! Far, far away from the Abbey Cottage, they were rambling through green fields and quiet woodlands, where not a sound, not a sign of the Temple-Thorpe revels could be heard or seen, to mar their quiet, or disturb their thoughts, talking of old times, old friends, and conjuring back the happiest memories of long ago. Oh, it was

a beautiful, a soul-stirring picture to behold that broken-hearted widow and her unfortunate boy, both bearing in their hearts a grief too deep for utterance, and each alike intuitively seeking to cheat the other to forgetfulness. Never, never, thought Walter Belmont, as he gazed upon his mother's face, and read in her love-beaming eyes the sad secret that was rankling at her heart; oh, never had he loved that mother so deeply, so devotedly as now. Her error, her fault, let it be what it might, and however fearful and terrible its consequences to himself, had so marred and made shipwreck of her happiness, that he could not but feel there was more reason, more cause than ever that he should love, honour, and, as far as possible, comfort her. He was the one sole prop, on which, in the hour of her deep affliction, she had to lean; his arms, his bosom, alone, constituted the haven, to which the stricken dove might fly away, and be at rest.

What were the motives which had induced Walter Belmont to propose, and so vehe-

mently to beseech his mother to accompany him on this day's excursion? What could induce that anxious and watchful care which he manifested for her every want, her every enjoyment?

Once and once only had the poor widow to put these questions to her heart, ere it prompted a truthful reply—

Pure, holy, heart-rooted—*filial love!*

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was long past sun-set hour ere the Widow Belmont and her son returned to the Abbey Cottage—the numerous lights, however, still visible at the mansion, clearly shewed that the day's revelry was not yet entirely at an end.

Mrs. Belmont, somewhat wearied and overpowered by the fatigues of her excursion, retired to rest early—or rather let us say retired to the privacy of her own apartment, where alone and undisturbed she might commune with her own heart. And long—long—did she there sit wrapt, in deep and serious meditation—long, indeed, into the calm, sober, thoughtful night.

Walter, as was his habit, at this season of the year, rambled out into the fields and

quiet lanes—he went not forth, however, on this occasion, as he had generally done before, that he might gaze upon that fairy-like region in its silence and repose; but that like her whose fond good-night was still echoing in his ear—the breath of whose parting kiss was still warm upon his cheek—he might hold serious and undisturbed commune with himself. And how many thoughts, sad, gloomy, depressing thoughts, had Walter Belmont to contend against.

Wearied and fatigued in body—yet with a mind and spirit schooled to perfect calmness and tranquillity—he was returning towards home, when the full bright moon suddenly emerging from the dark clouds, which had during the early part of the evening thickly curtained the horizon, clothed the huge ivy-mantled abbey of Temple-Thorpe in a perfect flood of light.

The effect of this sudden transition was electrical. Walter Belmont stood for a moment gazing upon the noble ruin—noble even its decay, and he was led almost in-

voluntarily to repeat those truthful, yet hacknied lines of the northern minstrel—

“If thou would'st view fair Melrose aright,
Go visit it by the pale moonlight;
For the gay beams of lightsome day
Gild, but to flout the ruins gray.
When the broken arches are black in night,
And each shafted oriel glimmers white;
When the cold light's uncertain shower
Streams on the ruined central tower;
When buttress and buttress, alternately,
Seem framed of ebon and ivory.
When silver edges the imagery,
And the scrolls that teach thee to live and die;
When distant Tweed is heard to rave,
And the owlet to hoot o'er the dead man's grave,
Then go—but go alone the while—
And view St. David's ruined pile;
And, home returning, soothly swear,
Was never scene so sad and fair!”

What a glorious thing is true and genuine poetry! It fixes like a great and marvellous truth upon man's mind—identifies itself with his thoughts and feelings—and inspires and ennobles the most holy and god-like faculties of his nature.

Walter Belmont at once entered the ruins, and there throwing himself upon a rude stone bench which had originally formed the window sill of a small apartment from which there was a full and perfect view of the cloisters and refectory—he gazed upon a scene such as painter or poet have but seldom portrayed.

Here, for a brief interval, we will leave him.

The festivities at Temple-Thorpe had gone off admirably—and the arrangements throughout had been such as to give the most unquestionable satisfaction to all—save to some few, who, like the imperious and high-minded Lady Sniffington, seemed to have so great a horror of being brought within the same circle, and of breathing the same air—as those who happened to be in more humble (though it might be in no less honourable) circumstances of life than themselves, that the very fact of their pre-

sence was sufficient to mar and destroy every enjoyment. To Lady Sniffington and her fastidious friends, however, we have nothing more to say ; but we would merely add, for the especial benefit of all entertaining similar feelings and prejudices—

‘ Oh wad some power the giftie gie us,
To see oursels as others see us !
It wad frae monie a blunder free us,
And foolish notion :
What airs in dress an’ gait wad lae’e us,
And ev’n devotion.’

The whole of the visitors, with the exception of a limited number of Mr. Belmont’s more intimate friends, who were to remain for some days at the mansion, had departed ; and the house, despite the hurrying to and fro of noisy servants, began to assume somewhat of its usual quiet and repose.

“ Well, Lindsay,” said Reginald Belmont, “ how are we to finish the day, eh ? What say you to another game at billiards ? ”

“ Not to-night, Reginald,” replied his Lordship, who was at that moment seated by

the side of Marian Belmont ; “ Not to-night, I have a strange fancy——”

“ For what ? ” exclaimed half-a-dozen voices at once.

“ To view the Abbey by moonlight. What say you, ladies ? ” and Lord Lindsay directed his question to those from whom he well knew he was least likely to hear any objection to his proposal.

“ Oh ! of all things, that would be most delightful ! Do, let us go,” exclaimed one.

“ Yes, and the sooner the better,” said another.

“ The moon is already risen !—Look, is it not a splendid night ? ” echoed a third, drawing back the blind from the window.

“ Ay, the very night, fair lady,” replied Lindsay, “ for such an excursion. Were we to remain at Temple-Thorpe for the next twelve months we might never again have so favourable an opportunity. But, methinks, we ought first of all to have heard the opinion of our fair hostess—what say you, Miss Belmont ? Have you any amendment to propose to my motion, or shall I at



once declare it carried without the necessity of coming to a division?"

Marian would have objected—opposed -- have done almost anything in short to have put an end to his Lordship's proposal; but she felt at that moment that the eyes of Mr. Belmont, who was seated on the opposite side of the room, were fixed steadily, sternly upon her; without venturing, therefore, so much as to raise a word in opposition she at once acquiesced.

"Well, I must say," said Reginald Belmont, who had observed his father's look—and interpreted it also pretty correctly, but who had no great regard either for *his* wishes, or for those of any other party. "Well, I must say, I think we are going to make a very bad conclusion of a jolly good day. The Abbey by moonlight may be very pretty and romantic; and, for aught I know to the contrary, much more striking than the Abbey by sun-light; at the same time, I can't but think we might have amused ourselves much better at home."

"Come, come, Reginald," said Lindsay, "don't give your mind to grumbling. The ladies have already decided the point, and their decision should of itself be sufficient to silence every objection. For once merely for once—do endeavour, if possible, to play the gallant in right good earnest."

Then continued his Lordship, turning to, and addressing a pretty, dark-eyed, coquetish-looking little woman, who had been the first to second his proposal. "To your care, Lady Markington, I shall confide my dissentient friend. Should he prove very agreeable and attentive, why, so much the better ; but if, on the contrary, he should be at all petulant and out of humour——"

"I'll manage him, depend upon it," interposed Lady Markington, rising from her chair, and approaching Reginald Belmont with an air of much gravity, which even *he* could not withstand.

"Now remember, Sir," continued she, as as she saw by the smile which settled upon his face the advantage she had gained,

“remember, I shall expect you will be most obliging, attentive, entertaining, and, in short, everything which a young gentleman, having a proper regard for the good opinion of a somewhat satirical though nevertheless a very good-natured little woman, ought to be.”

“Your ladyship, I trust, will find no just cause of complaint against me. However much I may object to a long walk and an old Abbey by moonlight, I can certainly have no objection to so fair a companion ; and, in fact, could I have anticipated the pleasure which fortune now seems disposed to thrust upon me, its very anticipation would have been sufficient to silence every scruple and objection. I reckon that no tax upon one’s patience can be compared to the pleasure of an hour’s agreeable converse with the inimitable Lady Markington.” And Reginald with an air of courtly flattery, of which, judging from his late ebullition of perverseness, one would scarcely have thought

him capable, raised the white, taper fingers of her little ladyship to his lips.

"There, now that will do," replied Lady Markington; "let that salutation be an armistice of peace between us."

"Bravo, bravo!" shouted Lord Lindsay, clapping his hands and smiling with joy and exultation.

"Excellent! excellent!" exclaimed the ladies, looking at each other in that peculiarly significant and wicked way in which ladies so well know how to look; when they intend that their words shall convey a deeper meaning than they express; and one and all gliding gracefully from the room, to make such change in their attire as a long ramble through the cold night air rendered necessary.

Mr. Belmont, although a silent had been an attentive and thoughtful observer of the scene that had just taken place.

"Well, my Lord," said he, addressing himself to Lord Lindsay, in a familiar and

subdued voice, as that gentleman threw himself on the couch by his side, "what progress?"

"Somewhat slow—but, methinks, pretty sure," replied Lindsay carelessly.

"Good: slow and sure, he stumbles who runs fast!"

"Very true—very true, Mr. Belmont; and yet, one may make slow progress and not be very sure after all."

"Never despair, my Lord," said Mr. Belmont with some warmth:

"When fondly wooed and closely press'd,
The coyest maids are first to yield;
'Gainst love and flatt'ry woman's breast
Owns no protective shield."

Oh, gold! gold! what a fearful—what a damning influence must be thine, thus to tempt a father to think—to speak of his own pure and unsullied child!

CHAPTER IX.

SCARCELY had Walter Belmont taken his place on that rude stone-bench within the ruins, as we have described in the foregoing chapter, when the sound of merry voices and the echo of approaching footsteps fell distinctly on his ear. His first impulse was to retreat, and thus to avoid coming in contact with the night wanderers, whoever or whatever they might be ; but, on casting his eyes along the gloomy cloisters, he distinctly recognised a lady and gentleman, walking arm-in-arm, and slowly advancing towards the place of his concealment. To have passed out without encountering them would have been impossible ; and rather than do this he determined to remain where he was, trusting that the curiosity of the strangers might not tempt them within the dark precincts of his



little hiding-place. In this he was not disappointed.

On arriving within a few yards of the spot where he was laid, the gentleman, disengaging the arm of his companion from his own, and seizing her hand, with a somewhat childish confidence, exclaimed :

“ And will you not vouchsafe me one word of encouragement, one word on which I may build even a distant hope ? ”

“ Do not, do not, I beseech you, press me more closely,” replied the lady in a low and tremulous voice ; “ I have spoken plainly, very plainly, perhaps even too much so ; but I would not, on any account, that there should exist any misunderstanding between us.”

“ But I must—I will have an answer. This suspense is intolerable ! ” replied the gentleman with some warmth.

For a few moments both were silent.

Although unable to distinguish the features of the speakers, Walter Belmont could not avoid hearing every word that passed between them. “ What, what shall I do ? ”

deep and bitter sorrow ! Her cheek was cold and colourless as the fairest marble ; her lips parched ; her eyes tearless. But oh, her heart ! how fiercely, how terribly it throbbed ; so terribly, indeed, that she felt as though she would have sunk down prostrate and powerless beneath the weight of its every pulsation. Ay, there stood the fair, the sorrow-stricken girl, draining to the very dregs the bitter cup of her first grief. For a moment all was still, silent as the grave, and

“ The beating of her own heart
Was all the sound she heard.”

And Walter Belmont ! What had been the effect of the conversation, he had so undesignedly over-heard, upon him ?—What, at this moment, were his thoughts ? his feelings ? Though years had passed away, since he had last seen that sorrowing girl, there was a time, still indistinctly chronicled on his memory, when he was wont to look upon his little cousin Marian, as his friend, companion, and playmate : a time when he

was wont to ramble with her through the old woods and quiet valleys of Temple-Thorpe, repeating their infantile stories, with brotherly and sisterly confidence : a time, indeed, of which Walter Belmont might almost have said,

“ I wonder, dearest, often yet,
 When sitting on that brink,
 Cheek touchin’ cheek, loof lock’d in loof,
 What our wee heads could think ?
 When baith bent down ower ae braid page,
 Wi’ ae buik on our knee,
 Thy lips were on thy lesson, but
 My lesson was in thee.”

But then — then the boy day-dreamer was living at Temple-Thorpe, and his cousin Marian used to come and visit them during her school vacation. Everything appeared strangely and mysteriously altered now ; and the memories of the past were, after all, little better than a mere dream of early childhood, shadowy and indistinct.

Walter’s first impulse was, that which nature prompted, to rush to his cousin’s side,

to speak to her freely, frankly, openly, as of old. For a moment he hesitated, faltered ; but nature eventually triumphed.

"Pardon me, Miss Belmont, pray, pardon me," said he, slowly advancing towards her, "for thus rudely and inopportunately breaking in upon your privacy."

Marian started, but spoke not.

"I have been," continued Walter, "though most unwittingly and undesignedly, a witness of the scene, which has just been enacted between Lord Lindsay and yourself. I regret such should have been the case ; but—but, believe me, I knew not how I should avoid it."

"It matters not, Sir ; it matters not," replied the young girl carelessly, though at the same time fixing her dark penetrating eyes steadily on his face.

"You—you do not remember me, Miss Belmont?" said Walter, remarking her scrutinising glance.

"Yes, I do—indeed, I do ; well—very well !" replied Marian, holding out her hand

towards him, with an air of unaffected confidence, "Walter, my dear cousin Walter!"

Oh! how Walter Belmont's heart beat as he heard Marian's fair lips pronounce those few words—pronounce them, too, in the same frank and ingenuous voice as she had frequently done long, long ago. There was the old, familiar, sisterly smile upon her cheek; the same old, familiar sisterly confidence in her manner and address.

"Though the last, it may be, to offer my congratulations," said Walter, taking his cousin's hand within his own, "believe me not the less sincere—May you have many happy returns of your birth-day; and may God bless you, Marian."

"Thank you, dear Walter, thank you!" replied the young girl, warmly. "But—but—" Marian hesitated.

"I know — I feel, Marian, what you would say. The light of your spring-time has been darkened; a cloud, a dark, an impenetrable cloud, even at this very moment,

obscures it in gloom. No matter, no matter, . . . fear not! be honest—be truthful.”

The young girl drew up her fragile form to its utmost height, and with a fixed, stern look replied,

“Walter Belmont, *I will* be honest, *I will* be truthful. Yes . . . yes . . . they may sacrifice me on the shrine of Mammon if they will; but—”

“God forbid that such should be your destiny, dear Marian,” warmly interposed Walter, and for a moment the young girl was pressed fondly to his heart. The sound of approaching voices broke upon their ears; and each, intuitively inspired by the same thought, the same fear, gazed anxiously on the other. Their hands closed, their lips met; and then, then, Walter Belmont glided quickly, though silently from the Abbey.

A few moments more, and the pale, sorrow-stricken Marian was surrounded by her laughing, light-hearted friends, and resting on the arm of Lord Lindsay.



You think, no doubt, that Walter and Marian Belmont were what the world calls lovers; and that the little scene we have just described was nothing more or less than a display of love's impassioned romance. A romance in which every boy and girl are at one period or another of their early lives, but too apt and ready to indulge. Not so, not so! These two young beings, whose hearts were as yet unsullied by cold and selfish feelings, whose natures were as yet imbued with the truthfulness and sincerity of earliest youth, had been friends, companions, playmates, at a period of life when life itself seems clothed with one eternal sunshine of happiness—when

“Truly gush all feelings forth
Unsyllabled—unsung,”

and when boy and girl, shielded by the purity of their own hearts, their own sinless affections, may ramble forth into the world together and revel in the mutual interchange of warmest thoughts; and still

"No law

Of jealous custom, no suspected harm
Bids fresh virginity beware of man ;
But, like two sexless bees, from flower to flower,
They wander unreproved."*

In a word, they had been playmates in childhood. They now met, after the lapse of many years, under sad, sorrowful and painful circumstances. And what did they ? That only which all others, possessed of the same pure and spotless hearts, would have done. They spoke, they felt, as nature prompted. There was no masking, no disguise, no looking on each other with false and fickle glance ; but all was truth, truth clear and palpable as the light of day ! What a glorious thing is the human heart—ere it has been sullied and trammelled by the selfishness of a sordid and cynical world—to contemplate ! Aye, aye ; let cloistered monks and cold ascetics say what they please, the human heart, so long as it remains im-

* Hartley Coleridge.

bued with childhood's purity, is a rare fountain, a precious well-spring of love !

And yet, as we have already said, Walter and Marian Belmont were not, at this time, lovers ; but whether or not they may hereafter become so, it boots not now to question.

CHAPTER X.

“WELL, and what says my Lord Lindsay to the Abbey, now that he has seen it to the best possible advantage?” inquired Lady Markington, as the little party took their seats once more in the drawing-room at Temple-Thorpe.

“That it is one of the most splendid ruins in this or any other county throughout England,” replied his Lordship.

“You say truly ; and no doubt this night’s excursion will afford your Lordship many pleasing associations.” And the young blonde cast a significant glance towards Marian Belmont, as much as to intimate that she had now a pretty shrewd guess as to the real motive which had induced his Lordship’s proposal.

“The remembrance of every excursion

honoured by the presence of Lady Markington must at all times be of the most pleasing and gratifying character," replied Lindsay, laying his hand upon his heart, with all the affectation of a thorough-bred courtier, and without at all appearing to remark the intimation intended to be conveyed by the significant glances of her ladyship.

"You are complimentary, at all events, my Lord; but, of course, I know how to estimate your fine speeches. They are all very well, and prettily enough spoken, at times, but still they are entitled to very little weight; and, in fact, you will pardon me if I say that a sensible woman would scarcely deign to listen to them:" and Lady Markington, notwithstanding the light and flip-pant manner in which she spoke, evidently intended that her speech should convey its full meaning to her auditor; that, in short, he should feel the full force of its bitter sarcasm. Then, ere she had given him an opportunity of reply, she turned and appealed to Miss Belmont, adding—"Do you

not quite agree with me, my dear Marian, that his Lordship's fine speeches are the most common, consequently the most unmeaning things in the world."

"I quite think," replied Marian, as the colour mounted to her cheek, "that Lord Lindsay is certainly one of the most arrant flatterers I ever met with, and individually I have so thorough an abhorrence of flattery, that I invariably turn a deaf ear to the tongue that utters it."

"'Pon my honour, Lady Markington," exclaimed Lindsay somewhat testily, "you are much too severe upon me; and I fear my character, if left in your hands and at your mercy, would sustain no slight damage. And as for you, Miss Belmont, believe me when I say, you do me great injustice. I am no flatterer; indeed, I am not."

"No, that I'll answer for," said Reginald Belmont, stretching out his arms and legs and raising himself on a couch, where he had been laying for the last ten minutes in a state closely approximating somnolency,

“that I’ll answer for. A man possessed of Lindsay’s vanity, has no compliments to spare for any one but himself. But come, come, my Lady,” and Reginald advanced towards Lady Markington as he spoke, “I am not going to listen to any more of your homilies to-night. The card tables are now ready, and remember, I had your promise before we set out for the Abbey, that if I did ‘the agreeable,’ and fell in with your whims and caprices, you would afterwards do the same good offices by me. Come, come, what shall be our game? Vingt-un, Loo, or—”

“Oh, Vingt-un, by all means,” exclaimed half-a-dozen voices at once.

“Vingt-un, then, be it!” said Reginald, leading Lady Markington to the table, around which the little party were soon seated, and speculating to their heart’s content on the chances of fickle fortune.

Poor Marian Belmont! what a difficult part had she to play; what a difficult character to sustain, amidst that light-hearted

and happy group. How gladly would she have stolen away to the privacy of her own quiet room, where alone and unobserved she might have given full vent to her harrowing and pent-up feelings ; where she might, in secret, have indulged in that great and inexpressible luxury, which to a stricken and overburdened heart is far more grateful than all that sympathy or consolation can offer—the precious luxury of tears ! None, save those who have really and truly felt the gnawing pangs of a hidden and secret grief, can truly estimate the worth, the influence of every pearly drop as it slowly oozes from the deepest well-springs of the heart.

But here, as he had been on almost every occasion throughout the day, Mr. Belmont was again at hand ; and every look, every word of the unhappy Marian was the subject of his strict, though silent surveillance. Often, indeed, as a careless word or a harmless joke passed her lips, (for despite her bitter grief, Marian had to bear her full share in the idle repartée of that light-hearted circle,) a cloud



would settle on his brow, and he would regard her for a moment with an expression so dark and full of anger that she felt as though she would have fallen senseless at his feet.

The time passed slowly, tediously away ; and it was not until long turned midnight that the party was broken up.

Mr. Belmont and Reginald were alone.

"I tell you, Reginald," said Mr. Belmont, resuming a conversation in which they had for some little time been deeply engaged, "your sister will be fool enough to reject his proposals, after all."

"No, Sir, I think not," replied Reginald, coolly ; "my sister, although perhaps too young to have become deeply imbued with the worldly selfishness and ambition of her sex, has nevertheless her sex's weakness. There is not one woman in a thousand, however much she might dislike Lord Lindsay as a man, who would not be ready and glad to take him as a husband. His rank, position, fortune, would of themselves be more than sufficient to silence every objection."

"They should be so ; but the perversity of Marian's temper, and the coldness and indifference she manifests towards him, cannot long fail to work her own ruin. To bear it longer, Lindsay must either be mad with the intensity of his passion, or wanting in the ordinary amount of manly spirit."

"Tush, tush, Sir, it will be no difficult matter to cozen his Lordship for a day or two ; vain and conceited as he is, he is not the man readily to take offence ; and I'll venture to say, by the end of that time, Marian will begin to think very differently to what she appears to do at this moment."

"Well, I have set my heart on this match——"

"And rest assured, Sir," interposed Reginald, "your heart's wish will be gratified. Marian Belmont, when she has had full time to reflect upon this matter, to picture to herself the position she will hold, the influence she will possess, and, above all, the wealth she will have at her disposal, as the wife of

Lord Lindsay, will not long hesitate between her love and her ambition ; or at all events, let her do so, and she will well deserve the fool's cap and bells for her wedding portion, should she ever afterwards mate herself with another."

"Yes, and rest assured, Reginald, should she dare to thwart my wishes in this instance, she must abide the consequences of her disobedience," and Mr. Belmont's brow grew darkly clouded at the anticipation of such an event. "But enough—enough, Reginald," continued he, "we now thoroughly understand each other. I shall rely on your aid in keeping up the delusion with which I have thus far managed to inspire his Lordship."

"A delusion which, if I mistake not Lindsay's temper," replied Reginald, "will require but little of our fostering care. His own overweening vanity will be sufficient to effect that object. As you are aware, Sir, I have known Lindsay intimately for the last four

or five years ; from the time, in fact, when we were college chums, and you may believe me when I say that he will sooner marry my sister against her own consent, than he will have it bruited to the world that his proposals have been rejected. Ay, ay, that would indeed be a slight, a degradation, he would never be able to contend against."

"Reginald," and Mr. Belmont looked his son steadily, almost sternly, in the face, "is this your serious opinion?"

"It is, Sir, and I dare vouch my life upon its truth."

"Then we are safe. Despite all opposition, all idle cavil and objection, Marian Belmont shall ere long become Lady Lindsay, and then one, one at least, of the great objects of my life will be attained." And Mr. Belmont, without offering any further remark, hastily left the room.

"And then, and then," mentally ejaculated Reginald, following his father's steps, "I shall have secured a good friend, one who

may serve me well in a time of pressure and necessity."

Alas! for the unhappy Marian! The members of her father's house, her own kith and kin! were leagued against her. Those to whom nature would have prompted her to fly for solace and consolation were the very parties who were most studiously engaged in plotting to deceive and entangle her. Oh! that that cold, selfish, gold-worshipping father, and that reckless and abandoned brother, could have looked upon their youthful Marian at the moment when they were speaking so coldly and disparagingly of her conduct. Surely, surely, the sight would have inspired them with better feelings, better thoughts.

Stretched upon her little, though elegantly adorned couch, her face partly shielded by its snow-white drapery from the rays of a small argent lamp which was burning in the room, calmly, serenely slept the young girl. A tear, the last that had oozed from her bright

eye ere she had fallen into sleep, still hung upon its long dark lash ; but a smile—a soft, sweet smile—had settled upon her cheek, and every trace of anxiety and sorrow had passed away.

Pure and innocent was the expression of that young girl's face at that moment, as the expression that lights up the cheek of earliest infancy, as it lays unconsciously dreaming away its brief season of purity and happiness, fondly pillowed upon a mother's breast.

Marian's dream-land was a happy one !

CHAPTER XI.

WALTER BELMONT's first thought on the following morning was to apprise his mother of his brief interview with his cousin, and more especially of her apparent warm-hearted frankness and sincerity. Not one word, however, said he, of Lord Lindsay, or of the conversation he had so unwittingly overheard. *That* Walter felt was a secret too sacred even for a mother's ears. Gladly would he, if possible, have blotted it from his own memory !

It was no slight source of consolation to the heart-stricken Widow to hear that Marian still appeared to be unchanged ; the same kind, warm-hearted girl she had been years ago—for despite the sorrow and suf-

fering Mr. Percival Belmont had caused her, the Widow's heart still fondly yearned towards her young relatives. Why, why her own child, however, should have been excluded from the yesterday's festival, was a question the Widow Belmont found somewhat difficult to solve. Surely had his cousins desired his presence, their father would not have gainsayed it. But no matter, it was but one slight, one indignity, amongst many others to which she had latterly been subjected ; and deeply as it had pained and grieved her for the moment, it was now passed, and would be readily forgiven. Walter himself appeared no longer to regard it as worthy of a thought.

It was a calm, bright, sunny morning, and the Widow and her son rambled forth into the little garden with lighter steps, and it may be also with lighter hearts, than they had either of them known since that painful interview when Walter first became acquainted with his misfortune, his disinheri-

tance! There, in that little garden, old Frank Hartwell, as usual, was busy at work, but old Frank also was wonderfully changed. He was singing merrily at the top of his voice, and moving about from place to place with most unaccustomed agility. No sooner, however, had he recognised his kind mistress and young master, than his song ceased, and he saluted them as they approached with his usual deference and respect. There was an expression, nevertheless, of such thorough self-satisfaction and contentment visibly mirrored upon his face, and his dark sunken eyes peered out from beneath their thick bushy brows with such unaccustomed brightness, that the poor Widow looked upon him in perfect wonder and bewilderment. A few words of friendly and familiar intercourse was all, however, that passed between them; when the Widow and her son resumed their walk, and the old man resumed his work. And throughout the whole of that day Frank Hartwell worked and sang as he had not

worked and sang for many a long year before.

If the happy thought which that old man had conceived as he sat puff, puff, puffing his white clay pipe at the little hostelry, on the previous day, should eventually prove abortive and fallacious, it sufficed for the present, at all events, to inspire him with a measure of hope and cheerfulness, far beyond what he had latterly been accustomed to experience. That thought, however, whatever it might be, was religiously guarded within the old man's breast; he had too deep and well-founded a knowledge of the mischances attendant upon all human affairs to say aught on which others might prematurely build their hopes—when, after all, the ultimate realization thereof was a matter of doubt and uncertainty.

Walter Belmont, notwithstanding the apparent calmness and serenity of his temper, was evidently in a very sober and reflective mood; yet he was neither sad nor sorrowful,

As he had already declared, he was now bent upon devoting himself to some active and honourable pursuit, whereby he might be enabled to advance himself in life and become the architect of his own fortune. And his thoughts and reflections were based upon this object. "How shall I proceed? Of what profession or calling shall I make choice?" were questions which long puzzled his young and inexperienced brain. The world was all before him. And what a vast theatre is the world to contemplate, thronged as it is on every side by players of every class, of every degree; each alike seeking to win his way to wealth and reputation. How puzzling and perplexing a matter has it often proved to many far more advanced and experienced in life than Walter Belmont, to fix upon their worldly calling and occupation. Nor is this matter of wonder or curiosity! Man has only to look out into the world, to mark the week-day toil and struggle, the continual fret and anxiety of

those by whom he is surrounded ; and then, for one moment, to contemplate the varied results, the success of some, the failure of others, all alike apparently sober, earnest, pains-taking, and persevering, to become sensible of the innumerable risks and chances attendant upon the busy game of life. "Ingenuity and perseverance overcome all difficulties !" This is the old and oft-repeated maxim of men of the world, and perhaps in the main it is perfectly true. Yet, how often do we see ingenuity and beggary go hand in hand—perseverance and pauperism stand side by side ! The great, and perhaps, indeed, the principal difficulty with which men in the outset of life, and more especially at the time when they are called upon to fix upon their future course, have to contend, is the ignorance which all must feel, until they have been fairly tried and tested, of their own powers and capabilities. True it may be that in the affairs of life, as in everything else, "the race is not always to the swift,

nor yet the battle to the strong"—nevertheless, it may be stated as a general principle, that success is the reward only of talents properly and industriously applied. Exceptions, startling exceptions there are, no doubt, of men who have had, as it were, good fortune thrust upon them—unsought, unmerited, and yet, after all, such cases are but exceptions to the rule. A man who sets out in serious and sober earnestness to carve out his own way—to work out his own fortune—will set but little store upon, nor expect to derive much from the "chapter of accidents." And yet, true and unquestionable as this may be, as we have before said, we have only to contemplate for a moment the success of some, the failure of others, to assure ourselves of how serious and important a matter it is to fix upon one's future calling or profession.

"How shall I proceed? Of what shall I make choice?" exclaimed Walter Belmont again and again. And Walter Belmont

was too serious, too earnest, in his determination to be drawn from his purpose, however much he might be startled by the difficulty he found in satisfactorily answering these questions.

“Yes, yes” — mentally ejaculated he, bringing his cogitations to an end, “I am now decided. I will seek my fortune through the Bar. Why should not I become an advocate as well as others? Many, very many, holding even a more humble position in life than myself, have there fought their road to wealth and affluence—to rank and honour.”

In this decision the Widow Belmont, building her hopes, as mothers, especially widowed mothers generally do, on the talents and capabilities of her boy, readily concurred.

The Bar! alas, alas, how many like Walter Belmont have at one time or another sought to make the Bar their goal of ambition, their stepping-stone to fortune; but how few out of the many have attained their object.

Little, indeed, do men, young and inexperienced in the world know, or even dream of the care and anxiety of an advocate's life. From first to last, it is ever one continued round of patient labour, diligent research, and deep and unwearying study. From the first outset in his career even to the very moment of its close, he who would win and sustain the character and reputation of a skilful and safe advocate, must labour day after day, hour after hour, like a slave at the oar. Let him but once relax his labours, and the chances of his ultimate success are fearfully imperilled; let him but once be fairly shaken on his pedestal, and it is more than probable that he will never again be able firmly to maintain his position. Nor are these difficulties, perhaps, the most trying and fearful with which he has to contend. To every man, no matter how great and many may be his mental acquirements, who makes the bar the theatre of his fortune, it may very truly be said,

"Faint not, you must bide your time!" Aye, and this fearful bidding of one's time it is that constitutes, after all, the most trying and serious difficulty! It is the tax which ninety and nine men out of every hundred, find the most fearful to discharge. Year after year, day after day, must the aspirant advocate be found at his post, laying up for the future rich store in the treasure-house of knowledge. He must still sow, sow, sow—though as yet heaven alone knows when his time of reaping his harvest may arrive. Well and fortunate, indeed, will it be for him if the deep furrows of care and anxiety have not limned his brow, if the grey hairs of declining years have not long been visible upon his head, ere he wins for himself a reputation and a name; ere, in short, he is known and acknowledged as a rising YOUNG man at the bar. And out of the vast number who are, year after year, taking their places within the forensic arena, how many, alas! are destined, after all, to bitter disap-

pointment and defeat? How many who are now looking forward, cheered and sustained by bright hopes and anticipations, will, in the day of saddened and doting old age, be destined to look back upon the course they have run, without finding one sunny spot on which with satisfaction they may dwell, without finding one object realized, one hope sustained. The toil, the fret, the struggle they have endured, will have passed as a dull tale that is told; and what shall they anticipate beyond?

The Bar! It is an honourable, but a bold and perilous venture for a young man to take.

There is a peculiar halo or lustre around the names of many such men as Scott, Dunning, and Campbell, which few young men can look upon, calmly and unmoved. Let them, however, beware ere they rashly throw themselves within the vortex, perilling a whole life's happiness and prosperity upon that one hazardous and fearful cast; or they

may find, when it is too late, that that halo, like the bright glare of the midnight lamp which lures the poor, but intrepid moth within its blaze, will serve only to tempt them to their own bitter sorrow and destruction.

Walter Belmont, however, had no fear, no misgiving. He had made up his mind to the struggle, and thought only of victory.

Finis coronat opus.

CHAPTER XII.

THE day was drawing rapidly towards its close, and the Widow Belmont and her son were sitting in the little parlour at the Abbey Cottage, sipping their quiet and social cup of Bohea, and talking over the many and promising plans, which the latter had already formed for the government of his future course; when a light footstep was heard in the vestibule followed by an immediate knocking at the door of their apartment. Scarcely had the words "come in" passed their lips, when Marian Belmont glided softly into the room.

"Dear, dear aunt," exclaimed she, rushing towards the wonder-stricken Widow, and taking her hand warmly within her own, "I am so glad that you are at home. But pray, tell me, are you well? are you happy? You

look much paler and more careworn than when I saw you last."

"Yes, dear Marian," replied the Widow as she fondly pressed her lips on the blooming cheek of her young relative, "I am very well: and, perhaps, as happy, or indeed, I may say happier than most people, situated as I am, would be. But tell me, dear, why have you been so long in visiting us? I began to think you had entirely forgotten your *poor* relations." And the widow laid a strong emphasis on the concluding words.

"No, no, aunt; there you did me wrong. The remembrance of the kindness, the motherly kindness with which you used to treat me long, long ago, when I used to come and visit you at Temple-Thorpe, and before I was sent off to town, is too deeply engraven on my mind ever to be erased. You cannot, you did not, I am sure, think I was so ungrateful. I was led to believe, on my return from school—which, as probably you may know, took place some little time ago—that

you were absent from home, and that the Abbey Cottage was at present closed. It was only last night, by mere chance—mere accident, that I happened to meet my cousin in the Abbey. The circumstances, however, under which we met, were such, that we had time but to exchange a few words. It struck me though, after we had parted, that you had in all probability returned ; and believe me, I have taken the first opportunity of stealing from the crowd of visitors now staying at Temple-Thorpe to visit you ;” and there was an air of simplicity and truthfulness about the girl’s manner and address that was wholly irresistible.

“And believe me also, my dear Marian,” replied the Widow, “I am heartily glad to welcome you ; and hope we shall now very, very frequently have you with us.”

“That you will, aunt ; and to spend a much longer time with you than I shall be able to do this evening.”

After these few words of explanation, and

a kind greeting of her cousin Walter, who had hitherto remained unnoticed, Marian took her seat at the table, and the conversation, though still turning upon old times, and family affairs, assumed a much more general and diffusive character.

The hour, however, passed rapidly away, and as Marian had already intimated, her visit on this occasion must necessarily be short. Short though it was, it amply sufficed to satisfy her companions that Marian Belmont was, indeed, unchanged; that that beautiful and fascinating girl, now rapidly approaching womanhood, possessed the same warm and affectionate heart by which she had been so signally characterized when a child.

"I must—I must, indeed, be going," said Marian, at length, putting on her bonnet, which had been carelessly thrown aside; "It is now drawing close upon the hour when the gentlemen usually make their appearance in the drawing-room; and were I to be found absent, I know not what might be the

result. Doubtless a hue and cry would be raised throughout the country, and I might subject myself to a severe lecture for my carelessness and inattention. Good bye, dear aunt, good bye."

"Good bye, Marian; and God bless you." And for a moment the Widow and her niece were clasped fondly in each other's arms.

It is, perhaps, scarcely necessary to say that Walter Belmont accompanied Marian on her walk towards Temple-Thorpe.

It was a calm, quiet evening. Twilight had just set in, and the fair landscape, by which they were surrounded, was gradually becoming more and more shadowy and indistinct. Not a sound, save the occasional chirping of some solitary bird as it hastened to its roost—disturbed the universal silence which prevailed. Nature, as though wearied and worn out, had sunk into a deep sleep; and things animate and inanimate alike participated in the general repose. Even the flowers, which had but a brief hour ago

disported themselves on the very pathway over which they trod, had folded up their velvet petals, and drooped languidly towards the ground.

For some little distance Walter Belmont and his cousin pursued their way in silence.

"I wonder, Walter," said Marian, at length, "how long, how very long ago it is since we last walked this quiet road together."

"Many, many years, Marian," replied Walter, "and yet I seem, at this moment, to have a most clear and distinct recollection of many of the incidents of that happy time, that time when we used to be playmates and companions. Circumstances and events, which I had thought buried in oblivion, present themselves fresh to my remembrance, as though they had occurred but a few weeks—a few days ago."

"Is it not even thus, Walter? Do we not, from first to last, garner up in the storehouse of memory, the bright dreams of life

as they pass ; there it may be to remain, year after year, neglected and forgotten, until some old chord of the heart's past affections be again re-touched, some old familiar feeling be again re-kindled. Then, and then only do we find, that those bright dreams, instead of having fallen like baseless fabrics to the ground, remain graven upon the mind, so clearly and distinctly, that even in their very memory we again realize a measure of past happiness and pleasure."

"Indeed, Marian, it must be so," replied Walter, almost involuntarily drawing his companion still closer to his side ; "or how shall we account for the fact, that joyless and imbecile old age, is so frequently found, at the very moment, when it appears ready to sink beneath its burden of accumulated woes, suddenly to assume the bland smile, the happy expression of early life ; as some one or other of the early life's best, blessed memories are conjured back. Yes, yes, if one may judge from the miserly tenacity

with which old age ever grasps its memories of the past, it finds in those memories a balm more precious than all the world's riches could supply."

"Ay, indeed, Walter, if we except an old man's hopes of that peaceful haven where 'the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest,' the memories of the past will be found, perhaps, to afford the brightest sunlight that falls upon life's varied pathway, as it verges towards the borders of the grave. And youth and mid-day life—pregnant as they may be with hope and anticipation—have also many—many dear and treasured memories. Young even, as *I* am—I could not afford to lose all remembrance of the past."

"True, Marian—every era of life has its own peculiar charms—its own 'green spots' of Eden-land; once known never afterwards forgotten. Who shall say but that, to you and I, the memory even of to-night.—"



"The memory of to-night, Walter," interposed Marian, looking sorrowfully in his face, "will one day or other, stand prominently forth a green spot—a sunny cloud, in the vast and gloomy wilderness of *my* life's pilgrimage."

And it was so ! * * * *

"You know sufficient already," added Marian, after a brief pause, "to be assured that my dark and horrifying anticipations of the future are not baseless and unfounded. You know—you *must* know, Walter, since our last night's unexpected rencontre in the Abbey, with how sad a destiny I am threatened."

"You allude to Lord Lindsay, Marian?" asked her companion in a somewhat hesitating and subdued voice.

"Yes, Walter," replied Marian, "but I—I will remember your counsel, I will be honest, I will be truthful; yet even this will not save me. I feel even now, they have cast a

net around me, and I am too deeply entangled in its meshes to escape."

"*They*," re-echoed Walter, in unfeigned amazement. "They ! Who has ventured to league himself with my Lord Lindsay against you ?"

"One, Walter, whose influence, above all others, I have the least power to control—whose word I have the least right to gainsay—my father !"

"Mr. Belmont !" exclaimed Walter, starting and gazing steadily on her face : "No, no, Marian—it cannot be. Surely no father would dispose of his own child in marriage, at the very foot of God's holy altar contrary to her own wish, her own heart."

"Yes, dear Walter, this will Mr. Belmont—this will *my* father do ! And in thus disposing of me he will not, for one moment, think that he is guilty of any wrong, but he will think rather that he is doing that only which will eventually promote my happiness and welfare."



“It must not, it shall not be, Marian,” replied Walter impetuously.

“But who will have the power to gainsay it? Yes, Walter, it must be; despite all that I may urge to the contrary, I feel that I am destined to become the wife of Lord Lindsay—Gold, gold! is the one great object of my father’s ambition—and to that ambition he will sacrifice even his own child.”

And thus, as they rambled through the quiet woods and green fields, talked Marian Belmont and her cousin Walter. The one with sisterly confidence, disclosing the secret sorrows of her young heart, the other, with brotherly affection, endeavouring to solace and mitigate her grief.

All this may seem, (and you may think it so, if you please) very unworldly—very unlikely—but they were two of nature’s children, and whatever else their conduct might or might not be, it was very natural.

It was not until they had arrived within a short distance of the mansion that Walter

Belmont bade an affectionate, though a somewhat sorrowful, "good-night" to the warm-hearted, confiding Marian. He clasped her for a moment to his heart, grasped her hand more firmly within his own—and pressed, as he had often done during the days of childhood, his warm lips upon her cheek.

So free, so candid, so unquestioning, was the confidence which had been thus suddenly re-kindled in their bosoms, that they parted like

"Twa bairns with but ae heart."

Well would it have been for those young confiding creatures, had that parting been less warm—less sincere. It is a dangerous, though a noble thing to wear one's heart pinned on the outside of the breast; to allow one's words, actions, looks, to betray the secret thoughts that are passing through the mind. A long intercourse with the world—and a thorough experience of the bitter

treachery to be met with in every-day life, will soon, however, suffice to subdue, if not altogether to uproot, the first fond frankness of the human heart. The world, in the majority of cases, proves but a harsh, hard school,

“Where all is counterfeit,
And truth hath never say.”

And the experiences of life but too frequently serve to convince us that

“Men on men still gleam,
With falseness in their eyes.”

But Walter and Marian Belmont were still young, their hearts had not yet become swayed and trammelled by the cold feelings, the harsh principles, of the world's cynical school. They thought, spoke, and acted as nature prompted ; and, alas ! alas ! for the result.

They parted !—and secret and unobserved as they deemed that parting to have been, another's eye had witnessed it—another's

ear had greedily drank in its every word of fondness and endearment, and——

Scarcely had the hall door closed upon the entrance of Marian, ere the shadow of her brother Reginald darkened the threshold.

CHAPTER XIII.

"AN' is it really true, Master Walter, that you are going to leave us for awhile?" asked old Frank Hartwell, of his young master.

"It is, indeed, true, Frank," replied Walter Belmont, "but I trust I shall not be long absent, not more than a fortnight, or three weeks."

"An' you're going to see London, after all?"

"I am; but it is not for the mere sake of seeing London, Frank, that I am induced to undertake so long a journey; I have a better, a higher object in view."

"Yea, yea, Master Walter, I guess how

it is. You are springing up into manhood, an' you are growing a-weary of the dull life of the Abbey Cottage. You would be out i' the world, struggling with the crowd, and working your way to fortune with the best o' them. Is it not so?"

"It is, Frank, and think you not I am right?" asked Walter, with a light heart and cheerful voice.

"Yea; it is no doubt right—very right, Master Walter, for a young man to turn his hand to an honest calling, to make an honest penny when he can, and yet——"

"Well, why do you hesitate?"

"I—I never thought I should live to see the day," replied the old man, in a subdued and tremulous voice, "when Walter Belmont—my own good master's son, would have to turn out like the rest o' men, to seek his fortune i' the wide world. It ought not so to be; no, no, it isn't right, Master Walter, it isn't right."

"Tush, tush, Frank," replied Walter,

laying his hand familiarly on the old man's shoulder, "why should I expect to get through life more easily than another? Some men, it is true, are born great—others have greatness thrust upon them, and have no necessity to join in the toil and struggle of a busy work-a-day life. Such, however, has not been my fortune; hence I must share the common lot, and 'tis no dishonourable one; and achieve by my own industry and perseverance, whatever greatness I may be destined to enjoy. And, believe me, Frank, there are no riches—no honours—so dear to a man, nor yet so commendable in the eyes of the world, as those which he may happen to attain by his own labours. It is a glorious thing to be the architect of one's own fortune; the champion of one's own greatness."

"True, true, Master Walter, you speak well; but oh, you know not the difficulties that will beset you. It is a hard matter to fight one's way in the world."

“ Well, be it so, Frank,— what of that ? Others have been successful, why should not I ? ”

“ You must, and you will succeed ! It would be a shame indeed, an’ ye did not,” replied the old man warmly.

“ At all events, Frank, I believe I shall have your best wishes, and it is no slight satisfaction for a young man at the outset of his career to know that others are little less interested in his welfare than himself.”

“ Walter Belmont,” exclaimed the old man, after a brief pause, “ you say right ; I should be an ungrateful old brute indeed, did I not feel the deepest interest in your success. Had it not been for your father, I might have been struggling and toiling now, without so much as having a farthing laid up in store for the necessities of my old age ; he was as good and liberal a master as ever lived. And—and to think after all that I should have lived to see his widow and his child turned out of their own home—their



own house,—slighted, neglected, and looked down upon by those whose very names are not fit even to be mentioned in the same breath. Well, well, Walter Belmont, it was a hard fate,—but no matter—no matter.”

“I have ceased to think upon the past, Frank,” replied Walter, “and look only to the future. What though I have lost Temple-Thorpe, a day may arrive when I shall be the owner of a still more noble and princely domain. Come, come, you know the old motto, ‘never despair.’”

“No, no, that will I not, Master,” exclaimed Frank, and his brow brightened as he spoke, “right *is* right after all, and justice will be done i’ the end, depend upon it.”

The above conversation, and much more of the same character, but which we deem it unnecessary to detail, took place on the day following the one spoken of in our last chapter, when Walter Belmont and the faithful old gardener happened unexpectedly to come across each other in one of the little planta-

tions which skirted the borders of the lake within the grounds of Temple-Thorpe.

How long they had stood talking, or how long they might still have continued to do so, but for the circumstance we are about to describe, we know not.

Although within some twenty or thirty paces of the lake, the spot where they were standing was so completely surrounded by thick and entangled brushwood, (which to all appearance had been left untouched by the woodman's axe for many a long year past,) that every chance of obtaining a sight of its transparent waters was completely shut out. The very pathway which led to the spot was here and there so completely overrun by the struggling branches of dwarf shrubs and woodland ferns, that to the eye of a stranger it frequently became altogether imperceptible, and even to one who had known every by-path and secluded walk on the estate for years, it was no easy matter to follow its dubious windings for any great distance.



Such was the wild, though sheltered and secluded spot, where Walter Belmont and Frank Hartwell had met—and where, while they were engaged as we have above described, in the mutual interchange of friendly and familiar thoughts, they were suddenly startled and alarmed by a loud and piercing cry of distress. For a moment both remained silently gazing on each other; but again—and again that shrill cry rent the air—still louder—still more piercing than before.

“Frank, Frank!” exclaimed Walter, springing nimbly forward, regardless of every obstruction in his path, “follow me—follow me quickly—there is some one in the lake.”

“Ay, ay, Sir,” replied the old man, hurrying after his companion as rapidly as his tottering steps would allow, and for a short distance he kept close upon his heels.

By the time however that Walter Belmont had reached the line of rocks that formed on this side the boundary of the lake, his companion though still within sight was several paces in the rear.

While gazing on the dark waters which lay calm and undisturbed at a distance of some twelve or fifteen feet below the promontory on which he stood, Walter Belmont uttered a loud cry,—“Frank! Frank! for heaven’s sake be quick, scramble down the rock to the nearest point where you may aid me from the water’s edge. They are lost—lost—lost.” And ere the old man had time to reply, Frank Belmont, disencumbering himself of his hat and coat, had made one bold and determined spring, and a moment more and he was battling with the liquid element like the rest.

The poor old man stood transfixed upon that little promontory in perfect horror and dismay. Within some sixty or seventy yards of the base of the rocks a little pleasure boat had been upset, and no less than five human beings were seen struggling in the water. Three of them however were men, and they were labouring manfully, though with but little success, to aid their two female companions in their efforts to reach the shore.

Quickly—quickly—did Walter Belmont strike out and glide along the surface of the water. He was thorough master of the swimmer's art, and seldom if ever had that art stood him in more stead than at this moment.

"Walter, Walter!" shrieked a soft familiar voice, as he approached the affrighted strugglers, "save me—save me."

That voice inspired the intrepid man with new strength, new life.

A few minutes more, and Walter Belmont, manfully bearing his childhood's playmate—his confiding Marian in his arm, was again turned and struggling towards the shore.

"Dear, dear Walter!" were the only words that escaped Marian's pale lips when she found herself clasped for a moment in his arms, after they had gained the land. Then all around suddenly became confused—shadowy—dark—dark. Marian had fainted on his bosom.

And where were her friends—her companions?

Still struggling—still battling nobly with the waters, gradually but slowly they approached the shore—all were eventually saved. * * *

To poor old Frank Hartwell that day's catastrophe was most serious. No sooner had his young master plunged into the lake, than Frank, full of fear and trepidation for his safety, hastened to obey his last injunction, and scrambled from rock to rock, making his way towards the water's edge with wonderful agility. The descent however was a perilous one, and dangerous even to the firm and steady step of nimble youth. How the old man managed to maintain his footing at all was perfectly marvellous; still, here and there, holding on by the straggling branches and uncovered roots of the thick brushwood which surrounded him, he managed for a little while to accomplish his task in perfect safety. Scarcely, however, had he descended half way down the steep shelving bank, when a branch to which he hung gave way, his



foot slipped, and, wholly unable to recover himself, the old man tumbled and rolled (striking ledge after ledge in his course) upon the shore. There for some time he lay, moaning and wholly insensible; and it was not until after he had been removed to his own home, and had had administered to him such restoratives as befitted his condition, that he recovered anything like a distinct recollection of what had happened.

"Tell me, tell me, master Walter," said he as his eyes rested upon the face of his companion who was standing watching by his bed side, "did you save her?"

"Yes, Frank, yes! and her companions were saved also. You, I fear, will have suffered the most of any one on this occasion," replied Walter.

"Ay, ay, boy, I am hurt; sorely hurt! but it was my own fault. I was an old fool to go on scrambling in the way I did, trusting myself to every bit of a branch that would scarcely have sustained the weight of

a schoolboy. I should have known better, Walter ; I should have known better—an old man like me ought not to lose his wits at the very time he stands most in need of them.”

And thus, if he had not been imperatively restrained by his attendants, Frank Hartwell would have gone on railing against himself, and censuring his own want of prudence, to an indefinite length.

“Very well,” said he at last, somewhat petulantly ; “if I’m not to talk, I may as well try to sleep at once ; but—”

“Well,” said Walter, smiling at Frank’s evident dislike to their interference, “well?”

“I thank God that Marian Belmont’s saved, and that *you* were the one to save her ; that’s all.”

And the old man turned upon his bed, moaned heavily, and soon sank into a deep sleep.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE visitors at Temple-Thorpe were once more gathered together in the drawing-room, and, as may be readily supposed, the late misadventure on the lake, and the fortunate escape of Marian Belmont and her friends, formed the chief topic of conversation. The most minute details of the accident were duly recorded; and one could scarcely avoid marvelling at the extreme accuracy with which one or two of the parties who had been so fortunate as to pass through their late perils unharmed, seemed to have chronicled every little circumstance upon their memories. And yet, perhaps, after all, there was little to marvel at; inasmuch as we invariably find that men are ever prone to interlard the details of their own sufferings

and misfortunes with an accuracy and precision altogether incomprehensible. The most plain matter-of-fact man seldom speaks of "his perils by water, his perils by land, his perils by false brethren," or of any of the thousand hair-breadth escapes through which at one or another period of his life he may happen to have passed, that he does not seem, to a sober and attentive listener, to dress up his story with an air and spirit of romance that might startle even the most imaginative novelist who ever took pen in hand. We are all more or less disposed to indulge in what the world terms the wonderful and miraculous ! and never, perhaps, to so great an extent as when we are speaking of ourselves and our adventures. It is a common failing, to which the experiences of every day bear ample and indisputable proof. The marvellous cockney, were we to believe his own version, who may have happened to have had the mishap to have been cast over-board between Battersea Reach and London Bridge,

and have floundered for a few minutes, until some friendly hand was held out to him in the muddy and polluted waters of old Father Thames, will have escaped a danger scarcely less frightful and terrific than the veteran tar who has survived all the accumulated horrors and difficulties of shipwreck amongst the mountainous billows of the Atlantic ; or the sober and peace-worshipping Cit, who may have happened on some notable and extraordinary occasion to have escaped the random shot of a Chartist musket as he disported himself on Kennington Common, were we to give full credence to his own account of the matter, would lead us to believe that he had had an escape no less providential and miraculous than the man who stood fire in the foremost ranks of Corunna or Waterloo.

In the words of the old proverb, we are all disposed, under such circumstances, to make "mountains out of mole-hills," and to clothe with an air of grave and serious importance, "trifles light as air."

The effect produced upon the minds of two or three, at least, out of the five of the Temple-Thorpe adventurers, was not altogether dissimilar to the state of feeling we have just been endeavouring to describe. Marian Belmont, Lady Markington, and Lord Lindsay, certainly looked upon their late fortunate deliverance as one of the most providential and miraculous affairs imaginable; their companions, however (Mr. Belmont and his son Reginald), whatever might have been the true state of their feelings in the moment of danger, appeared, now that they were fairly out of harm's way, disposed to treat the whole affair with the utmost coolness and indifference; and spoke of it as a mere ordinary misadventure, unpleasant and disagreeable enough, but little, if at all dangerous.

"Well, well, you may say as you please, Mr. Belmont," exclaimed Lady Markington, with some warmth, "but you will not convince me that you are right. I have already

said, and I shall again and again repeat, that our deliverance was miraculous, and had it not been for the gallant and intrepid conduct of your nephew, I am strongly inclined to think our misadventure would have ended somewhat more tragically than it has done, after all."

"Pooh, pooh! nonsense!" replied Mr. Belmont, "your ladyship estimates the young man's services too highly."

"And in so doing, you pay but a poor compliment to the gallantry of your own friends," added Reginald.

"Why, yes—I—I can't but think," chimed in Lord Lindsay, "that, difficult as the task might have been, we should have managed to have got the ladies safely on shore without the gratuitous assistance of a stranger; at all events, for myself, I may say, I—I felt confoundedly annoyed when the young man swam away with Miss Belmont in the manner he did. I should have been proud to regard myself as her sole deliverer, but—"

"In few words, let me tell you, Lord Lindsay," interposed Lady Markington, a heightened colour suffusing her cheeks, "if you entertain a feeling of real and sincere regard for Miss Belmont, you owe that young man (as you are pleased to call him) a debt of gratitude which you may find it somewhat difficult adequately to repay. His conduct was most noble—he acted—"

"As any other man would have done under similar circumstances," exclaimed Reginald, interrupting her ladyship with little less scruple and pertinacity than her ladyship herself, only a few moments before, had manifested in her interruption of Lord Lindsay.

"Yes, yes, and after all we can only safely conclude that he was led away by the impulse of the moment. I much question, if Walter Belmont had been allowed five minutes for sober reflection, whether he would so much as have hazarded a wet jacket for the best of us," said Mr. Belmont, somewhat sternly.



“There, Sir, you are alike unjust and ungenerous,” replied Lady Markington, “Walter Belmont, I am satisfied, from the anxiety he manifested, not only for the safety of his fair cousin, but for that of her friends also, would not, whatever opportunity he might have had for forethought and reflection, have hesitated to peril his own life in their behalf.”

“Oh, he is a noble fellow !” exclaimed Reginald, with bitter irony.

“A lucky creature !” sighed Lord Lindsay, casting a furtive and inquiring glance on Miss Belmont.

“And best of all, he is my own nephew !” said Mr. Belmont, looking angry and annoyed.

“Gentlemen,” exclaimed Lady Markington, raising her voice much above its usual tone, and stamping her little foot furiously on the ground, “I will not listen to your ill-natured remarks any longer ; you are too bad for anything ! Walter Belmont, I re-

peat, acted most nobly—most bravely—and as few men beside himself would have done. Come, Marian, what say you? You will agree in this opinion, will you not?"

"I do, Lady Markington," replied the young girl, without so much as raising her eyes from the ground, "and all who truly know the goodness of my cousin's heart will agree with it also."

"Umph," sighed Mr. Belmont, and he walked fidgettily towards the window.

"Fudge!" growled Reginald, and he followed his father's example.

"Dem his heart and his goodness too!" mentally ejaculated Lord Lindsay, and he pushed his fingers through his hair, and looked dreadfully discomposed.

At a late hour of the same night, Mr. Belmont and Reginald sat alone, and as we have seen them on a former occasion, they were engaged in deep and serious conversation.

"Be assured, Sir," said Reginald, "our scheme will be defeated, and Lord Lindsay

will escape us after all, unless you can induce Marian, and that speedily, to assume a somewhat more courteous and respectful demeanour."

"Yes, yes, Reginald, I fear your forebodings will prove too true. It is unreasonable to suppose that any man, much less one of his Lordship's position, would tamely submit to your sister's coldness and indifference. She is a rash headstrong girl!"

"Were that the worst that could be said of her, bad as it is, I should have but little fear of the result."

"Eh! what do you mean, Reginald?" and Mr. Belmont, though evidently in a humour to listen to anything that might be said in his daughter's dispraise, gazed for a moment somewhat sternly on her traducer.

"Nay, nay, Sir, you need not look upon me," continued Reginald doggedly, "as though I was about to tell you that which is untrue. I again repeat, that had we merely Marian's rash and headstrong temper to con-

tend against, I should not despair of seeing her, and that shortly, the wife of Lord Lindsay ; but you may depend upon it, Sir, we have a much more powerful enemy to overcome. A woman's temper ! ha, ha, that may be crushed, broken, trampled upon, but——”

“ Well, why do you not proceed ?”

“ A woman's love is not so readily subdued.”

“ Love ! love !” ejaculated Mr. Belmont, striking his hand fiercely upon the table, “ Reginald, it is false ! I cannot, I will not believe that your sister has dared to love another than him whom I have chosen—than him whom I have promised shall be her husband. No, no ; your anxiety in this matter has prejudiced your judgment.”

“ It may, or it may not have done so,” replied Reginald, coldly ; “ a man under any circumstances, and even at the best of times, is generally accounted but a bad judge of the worth of his own opinions. Methinks, nevertheless, Sir, if you had but noted somewhat

more closely the warmth with which my sister spoke——”

“Of Walter Belmont ?” sharply interposed the listener.

“Ay, Sir, of Walter Belmont.”

“Tush, tush ! her warmth, as you please to call it, was but a momentary ebullition of feeling ; puerile it may be, and yet perhaps not altogether unnatural under the circumstances.”

“Then dub me, Sir, for the nonce, if you please, an unskilful interpreter of a woman’s words—a woman’s feelings !” replied Reginald ; then after a moment’s pause he again continued, “Be this however as it may, it matters little ; let my sister’s words mean what they might, they were sufficient at all events—and this, Sir, you cannot deny—to excite your displeasure and my Lord Lindsay’s jealousy.”

“That I was momentarily angered and displeased, Reginald, is true, perfectly true ; but that Lord Lindsay was moved by any

such feeling as you ascribe to him, is not only very questionable but very unlikely." And at that moment Mr. Belmont seemed disposed to break up the interview.

"Unlikely or not, I repeat, Sir, that my Lord Lindsay *is* jealous—jealous—"

"What, of a man whom Marian, until to-day, has not met for years past—of a man, in fact, whose very name has long been a forbidden sound within these walls. No, no, I do not believe it."

"Ah, there, Sir, you are mistaken : strict and watchful a surveillance as you may have kept over my sister's conduct ; much as you may have endeavoured to keep her aloof from the influence of the inhabitants of the Abbey Cottage—you have been deceived, outwitted."

"Reginald," said Mr. Belmont, sternly, "I know not to what you allude—in one word, what mean you?"

"Merely, Sir," replied Reginald with bitter sarcasm, "that a man, though he have the eyes of an Argus, will not at all times be en-

abled to pry into the ' whereabouts ' of a rash and headstrong girl, who is bent, *sans* reason *sans* everything you please, to follow the dictates of her own unbridled passions, and, for aught I know to the contrary, it may be, to marry the man of her own choice."

For a few moments Mr. Belmont was silent, evidently at a loss what interpretation he should place upon his son's words.

"Reginald," exclaimed he at length, in a less cold though a somewhat more serious tone of voice than he had hitherto assumed, "Reginald, it is to our mutual interest and advantage that your sister Marian should marry Lord Lindsay, it will be to our mutual loss if she does not do so ; for heaven's sake then why will you persist in your cross and petulant humour, and speak to me only in riddles and paradoxes ? Come, come, tell me plainly, what am I to understand by your insinuations ?"

Reginald had now worked up the old man to the very bent of his passion, he perceived

his advantage, was satisfied, and replied—
“Thus much, Sir, are you to understand, and to believe. I speak of facts—you may draw from them your own conclusions. Walter Belmont and my sister, notwithstanding all your care and watchfulness, have met in private—met, Sir, at an hour, and under circumstances, such as none save those who are affianced (having any regard for their own characters,) would have ventured to have done.”

“Impossible! you are misinformed—deceived.”

“Then, Sir, I am deceived only by the evidence of my own senses. No, no, Mr. Belmont, what I tell you is a fact. It was only last night—last night, Sir, while you and my Lord Lindsay were discussing the merits of your last jug of claret, over the dining-table, and my Lady Markington was indulging her indomitable penchant for talking with her female companions in the drawing-room, that I, happening to be at

that moment in the park, at some short distance from the house, became by mere accident cognizant of my sister's secret."

"In the park?" exclaimed Mr. Belmont, becoming deathly pale.

"Ay, Sir, in the Park! There, unobserved, I saw my sister walking arm in arm with Walter Belmont. I dogged their steps, and succeeded, ere the moment of their separation, in gaining so closely upon them, that I was enabled distinctly to see and to overhear all that passed between them."

"Well, well, proceed, Reginald."

"Whatever reason I had to question the position in which they stood to each other up to that moment, was at once and for ever dispelled. For a little while his arm encircled her waist, her head rested upon his bosom, their lips met—and words——"

"Hold! I cannot, I will not believe it," gasped Mr. Belmont, stamping his foot firmly upon the floor.

"That which I have told you, Sir, I again

repeat to be a fact ; and one of which it will perhaps be well the world should know as little as possible. There are facts, (and this, doubtless, would prove to be one of them,) which even Lord Lindsay would hold to be too startling to be gainsayed ; and fired as he may be by passion, I much question if his Lordship would condescend to mate himself with a girl who could so far forget herself as to ramble forth by night into the fields to enjoy in secrecy and private the society and companionship of his more fortunate rival. Let my sister's conduct, Sir, but once become bruited to the world, and despite all our endeavours, there will be high odds against her ever becoming Lady Lindsay."

A strange change came over the face of Mr. Belmont. He trembled violently, and appeared for a time wholly unable to reply. "If, if indeed this be true," mentally ejaculated he, "Lord Lindsay will at once forbear his suit, and, and the brightest day-dream of my life will be at an end."

“And how, Reginald,” at length said he aloud, “assuming that you are correct—that you have not mistaken some other parties for Walter Belmont and your sister—how are we to proceed?”

“Of that, Sir, I will speak with you on the morrow. Thus much, at all events, is clear : whatever is done, must be done quickly ; at the same time, Mr. Belmont, discretion—discretion must signalize our valour.”

And without allowing Mr. Belmont time for reply, the cunning, selfish, and abandoned Reginald glided silently from the room.

CHAPTER XV.

IT was a busy day at the Abbey Cottage, and all within its walls were, more or less, engaged in aiding the preparations necessary to the departure of their young master for the metropolis. Yet amidst the busy stir and confusion which prevailed, one could not well avoid remarking the absence of old Frank, who had always hitherto been accustomed, as it were, to command and regulate the proceedings of the little household band when any strange movement was on the tapis. The injuries, however, which the old man had sustained on the previous day were of so serious and dangerous a character that he was wholly unable to leave his bed, and the strictest injunctions had been laid upon his attendant that nothing whatever should be



allowed to interfere with his repose. Despite his own sufferings, however, and the Doctor's injunctions, old Frank would fain have scrambled down to the cottage, (ay, even though, as he said over and over again, he should suffer double for it afterwards) to have given a helping hand to his fellow-servants, and to have shared the last "Adieu" of the young adventurer ; and it is more than probable that he would have persisted in doing so had not the Widow Belmont and her son, at an early hour of the morning, walked over to his humble, though neat and cleanly little domicile, and thus forestalled his anticipated movement. Their interview was necessarily short. Sufficient, however, was said on all sides to satisfy the parties present how thorough and abiding an interest each had in the welfare and happiness of the other. Frequently, during that short interview, the Widow Belmont had nevertheless remarked an air of mystery and constraint about the conversation of the old man, altogether foreign to his

character ; and once or twice when for a moment his tongue seemed to be regaining its usual license, his allusions to the future prospects of Walter Belmont were so strangely mixed up with (as they appeared to her) the most wild and incoherent ramblings about the loss and recovery of Temple-Thorpe, that she was wholly unable to discover their sense or bearing. "Let me only get out again, and be able to move about," repeated the old man two or three times over, "and all will be right ! Ay, ay, all will be right."

Beyond this, however, Frank Hartwell said nothing to explain his meaning, or from which his listeners might form anything like an accurate conception of the real current of his thoughts.

There was one other visit Walter Belmont would gladly have paid ere his departure ; but he hesitated—feared to do so. It was long, very long ago, since he had last crossed the threshold of Temple-Thorpe, and he could not divest himself of the impression which

had fixed upon his mind, that his presence there now, justified as it would have been by the events of the former day, would be looked upon, by all save Marian, as an unnecessary and uncalled-for intrusion. Under these circumstances, he had but one resource ; and of this he at length determined to avail himself. A short but friendly and warm-hearted letter was readily written and despatched to Temple-Thorpe, addressed, of course, to Marian ! Think not, however, that that letter contained one word of the ordinary and commonplace sentimentalities of what is usually denominated a "love-letter." No such thing. As we have before said, Walter and Marian Belmont, deeply as they were attached to each other, were not, in the common and worldly acceptation of the word, "lovers !" They were friends—true, heart-rooted friends—and their friendship was the pure and unspotted shrine on which their hearts' best affections were consecrated.

Hour after hour, did Walter Belmont, after despatching his letter, await a reply ; each succeeding hour, however, was only destined to confirm the disappointment of the past, and to strengthen him in the belief that, uncharitable as the opinion was which he had formed of his friends at Temple-Thorpe, it was nevertheless just and righteous.

No answer came, yet Walter blamed not nor entertained one unkind thought of his cousin Marian. The fault was not with her.

* * * * *

The hour of departure was already passed ; the last adieu spoken ; and the tears which had started to the eyes of our young traveller, as he pressed his widowed mother to his heart, had been wiped away. All within his breast was now calm, tranquil, and serene ; hope, the delusive syren, whispered softly in his ear, and shed her flattering halo around his path. He had taken his first step in life,

and looked forward with trusting confidence to the end.

By the time he had reached the nearest post inn, which is situated at a distance of some three or four miles from Temple-Thorpe, and from which he was to proceed by the night mail coach for London, the day had already passed away, and the dark, dingy-looking streets through which he had to pass were comparatively silent and deserted. The shops with few exceptions were closed in, the day's labour was at an end, and the late bustling and noisy town presented at this moment as gloomy and melancholy a scene as one can well imagine. The drinking shops and gin-palaces, it is true, gave here and there a different aspect to the picture, and the loud laugh and bacchanalian chant which might, now and then, be heard re-echoing without their walls too clearly evidenced the mad revelry that was going on within. Here, as elsewhere, the pandemoniums of debauchery and vice seemed to possess a power-

ful attraction for the motley crowd; young and inexperienced, however, as Walter Belmont then was, he had but to gaze on the shrunken and emaciated forms of those poor sunken and degraded creatures who staggered to and fro in their immediate vicinity, to be assured how dreadful a scourge they were to the well-being and happiness of society. The gin-palace! It is a fearfully wicked and demoralizing place. Thousands upon thousands, could we unravel the secret histories of their lives, would almost everywhere be found, whose fortunes have been wrecked, whose virtues had been overthrown, and whose every earthly happiness has been utterly blighted and destroyed by the loathsome and debasing influence of the gin-palace. Were man to attempt to chronicle a tithe of the miseries which owe their birth and consummation to but one of these dens of infamy and shame, he might well despair at the fearful magnitude of his task. We pause not, therefore, to single out even one of the



many thousand evils to which the gin-palace gives rise ;—that those evils exist to a fearful and terrific extent is a fact too well known and established to be gainsayed, and that of itself is sufficient to justify our censure and to give weight to the warning we would hold out : “ Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither ; but beware ! misery, poverty, death, and destruction follow close upon his steps. If man has any regard for his character, his prosperity, his happiness here and hereafter, let him avoid, as he would a lazar-house, the pestilential atmosphere of the gin-palace ! ”

Scarcely had Walter Belmont found his way to the coach office, seen his luggage safely put away, and taken possession of his ‘ inside place,’ (as the old coaching phrase used to run,) when a carriage, drawn by a pair of fine, spirited horses, came rolling rapidly along the street, and was in a few moments brought to a stand alongside the coach.

“ You are just in time, Sir, just in time,” said the guard, raising his hand to his hat

with a grace peculiar to the members of his craft, addressing himself to a young and elegantly dressed gentleman, who was already busily engaged in assisting a lady from the carriage.

“Will ‘you see to the luggage then, at once, Mundell, or those blundering rascals of mine will put everything into confusion.”

“Ay, ay, Sir, I’ll look to it;” and the loquacious guard, unceremoniously thrusting aside a couple of liveried lacquies, who from their movements appeared pretty well to merit their master’s opprobrious epithet, at once began to arrange and stow away the packages of his newly-arrived passenger.

Though unable to distinguish the features of the gentleman and his female companion, Walter Belmont had distinctly overheard every word that had been uttered, and one voice at least sounded strangely familiar to his ear. It was not long since he had heard it last, and he would have known it again amidst a thousand others. Drawing himself

closer into the corner of the coach, and pulling his travelling cap over his face so that he might not be recognized, he remained perfectly silent. A moment or two, and the lady, closely enveloped in sundry cloaks, furs, and other *et ceteras* usually to be found amongst a female's travelling paraphernalia, was seated by his side and evidently settling herself down (if we may be allowed the term) for a long journey.

"Mr. Reginald," said she, addressing her companion who was standing by the coach door, "you will tell Marian I shall expect to have a letter from her in a few days. She must write me full particulars of her health, as I fear she may yet suffer from the effect of our yesterday's misadventure."

"Your ladyship's message shall be faithfully delivered, and I have no doubt your wishes will be gratified," replied Reginald, with an air of courteous foppery.

"And hark you, Sir, as you value my good opinion, let me warn you in future to

“speak somewhat less disrespectfully of your sister’s deliverer. Your prejudice against him is altogether unjust.”

“Why, as to that matter, Lady Markington——”

At this moment, the arrival of another inside passenger, and the angry vociferations of the guard at having been kept five minutes beyond the usual hour of departure, put an end to the conversation.

“All right,” bawled the guard, crack—crack—crack, went the coachman’s whip, and away rolled the mail on its road to the Metropolis.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHO that was accustomed to travel between Yorkshire and London in the gone-by days of stage-coaching, does not retain a most distinct and lively recollection of the night mail? It was a capital coach,—a first-class coach; and yet, after all, it was little better than the rest of coaches, which were, perhaps almost without exception, shaky, rattling, cribbed, confined, uneasy vehicles at best. There were few things in their day so well calculated to try a man's temper as these self-same stage-coaches, and we have little hesitation in saying that he who could calmly and patiently endure all the trials and vexations to which the traveller was then heir, must have been endowed with more good-nature and forbearance than the generality of

his fellow-men. These are matters, however, of which even the memory is now rapidly becoming shadowy and indistinct; a few years hence, and we much question if they will not be looked upon as the unfounded fictions of a by-gone age. Who, that has never been accustomed to travel otherwise than by rail, and in a carriage where he may sit, stand, and in many instances even lie at his ease, whirling through the country at the rate of thirty or forty miles an hour, can form anything like an adequate conception of the lengthened and protracted miseries of a journey to town even by that best of coaches, the Yorkshire night mail. His ideas of such a journey, we apprehend, would be somewhat similar to our own, when we seek to realize to ourselves the patience, the privation, and the suffering, which must have been imposed upon the travellers of a long-past generation, who were regularly conveyed, as the record of that period still shows, between York and London (God

willing) in the incredibly short time of six days ! Now, thanks be to the ingenuity and enterprise of the times in which we live, we are enabled to travel the same distance in as many hours.

The inside of a stage-coach ! Oh how vividly do we remember its miseries ! There have we sat, hour after hour, with our fellow-travellers, wedged and packed together, like so many lifeless bales in a box, unable almost to move hand or foot, even though we were suffering, as we often did, the bitterest agony of cramp. And oh, with what painful anxiety have we watched every change of passengers ; how we have speculated on the next new-comer, and how our heart has often sunk within us when, instead of encountering a spare or even a moderate-sized companion, or a young and pretty girl, with whom, albeit in a stage coach, one did not object to be brought into such close and familiar proximity, we were doomed to find ourselves driven to the sad necessity of shar-

ing our little compartment with a fat and brawny farmer, whose chief boast seemed to be in the fact that he was the largest man in the county and weighed at least five-and-twenty stones ; or, still worse, when we have found ourselves suddenly brought alongside a burly landlady, whose breath, redolent with the odorous perfumes of the tap, was for ever warm upon our cheek as she kept up an incessant questioning respecting all and everything we passed along the road.

And then again the bluff jarvey poking out his hand at the end of every stage—with his significant “ Please, Sir, remember the coachman,” and his surly growl if our *douceur* happened to be somewhat less than he thought right and reasonable to expect—together with a thousand other evils and annoyances of the same character—have served to leave upon our minds a most clear and startling memory of the good old times—‘ of which the old men seem so fond,’ the times when steam was in its infancy—when

railways were regarded as visionary and chimerical—and when Jehu had the thorough whip-hand of the road.

We now, however, return to the Yorkshire night-mail and its precious cargo ; asking, nevertheless, ere we do so, the forgiveness of our readers for this brief digression.

For a little while our three inside passengers maintained an indomitable silence, all evidently sufficiently employed by their own thoughts. When we recal to memory, however, the fact that Lady Markington,—the lively, brusque, talkative Lady Markington, was one of the three, it is not to be expected that such a state of things could exist for any very great length of time. The old saw is very truthful, and comes in at this moment most opportunely :

“ That tongueless you may find a maid,
I can conceive it ;
But silent with a tongue in her head
I'll not believe it.”

Her Ladyship was the first to break silence.

"Can you tell me, Sir," said she, turning towards Walter Belmont, "at what hour we shall arrive in Doncaster?"

"If I am correctly informed, I should say in about two hours and a half from this time," replied Walter.

"So soon as that! Well, we have certainly travelled very quickly since we started out."

For a few minutes both were again silent, and both evidently laboured under that very painful though very common dilemma, to the inhabitants of this country—of wishing, without exactly knowing how to get up a conversation. Lady Markington, however, was not to be foiled in her endeavours.

"I suppose the town will be very gay at this season?" observed she.

"Gay, madam, do you call it?" asked the third passenger, for the first time opening his lips, "gay, indeed!"

"Yes, Sir, why not? Epsom, Ascot and

Newmarket are always gay during their race seasons, and I can see no reason why Doncaster should not be the same," replied Lady Markington, endeavouring, but in vain, to get a glimpse of the speaker's countenance.

"And have *you* ever visited the places of which you speak so familiarly," enquired the stranger in measured and serious voice.

"Frequently, very frequently; and I can assure you I have seen more gaiety there in one day than one would find in London, under ordinary circumstances, in a week."

"Vanity of vanities! What must be the result of such a life?" soliloquized the stranger.

"You object, Sir, I presume, to the amusements of the turf—is it not so?" asked Lady Markington pertinently.

"Object, Madam," replied the stranger vehemently, "object, I should think I do; and every man who has a due regard for his

own welfare—I mean, Madam, his eternal welfare, must do the same thing.”

“You speak warmly, Sir.”

“Yes, Madam, because I feel warmly on this subject. Is not a race-ground an arena of debauchery and wickedness?”

“To those who choose to make it so, certainly,” replied her ladyship firmly; “but not necessarily.”

“I tell you, Madam, you will meet there the most abandoned and depraved characters on the face of the whole earth.”

“Well, and are you not liable to meet with such at every place of amusement you can mention. The theatre, the masquerade, and even at the Lord Mayor’s show, if you please.”

“They are all alike bad. Iniquity runs rampant at them all, and it is a shame that in a Christian country like this, such dens of infamy, such scenes of madness, should be tolerated. But pardon me, Madam,” and

the stranger drew a small pamphlet from his pocket, "will you do me the favour of accepting and reading this book—there you will find the whole subject fully considered, and I flatter myself you will find also that my arguments (for it is my book, my own book, Madam) are wholly unanswerable."

"I will certainly accept and also read your book, Sir," replied Lady Markington, "though I much question if I shall become a convert to its doctrines, as I conclude from the few words which have passed between us, that you have fallen into what I conceive to be the common error on this subject. You attribute to the amusement the vice of the individual! Do you not agree with me, Sir?" And Lady Markington appealed to Walter Belmont in support of her opinion.

"Most assuredly," replied he, "I think your ladyship has the best of the argument. For my own part, I never could understand why we should discard any pleasure which is in itself perfectly harmless and inoffensive,

tion, "and I hope you will not forget to read my book—good night!"

"Good night! good night!" re-echoed his companions in a breath.

The lantern was again withdrawn, the door closed, and old Bigsby (of whom we shall have something more to say by and bye) went his way, grumbling to his heart's content at the rapacity of *that* infernal driver who never knew when he was satisfied.

After a delay of some five or ten minutes, the night mail was again rolling heavily along the pavement, and its two inside passengers were no longer strangers to each other.

For a considerable distance Walter Belmont and his fair companion had the good fortune to escape the annoyance of any fresh arrival, and it was not until a second and a third stage had been got over, that their friendly and familiar *tete-à-tete* (for such, had we time to chronicle all that passed between them, their meeting might be

deemed), was brought to an end. Knowing as we already do, the high opinion which Lady Markington had formed of her fellow-traveller, knowing also in what light she regarded his conduct on a past occasion of difficulty and danger, and suspecting (which we, however, are as yet unwilling to do) that a much more close and friendly intimacy existed between him and the youthful Marian, than the mere fact of their cousinship would account for—this immediate friendliness and familiarity ceases to be a matter of astonishment, and we regard it rather as the spontaneous overflowing of two warm and generous hearts.

Lady Markington's parting words (after their arrival in town) were, "You will remember, Mr. Belmont, I shall at all times be happy to welcome you as my friend. I lead, upon the whole, a quiet and retired life, but nevertheless, you will occasionally meet at my table many who enjoy, and not unjustly, the reputation of being the ruling magnates

of the day. Come when you please, I shall be glad to receive you."

From that time forward Walter Belmont might boast of having, at least, *one* true, warm-hearted, and unchanging friend!

CHAPTER XVII.

SOME few days had passed over since the interview we last recorded between Mr. Belmont and Reginald. The bustle and excitement consequent on the birth-day festivities had subsided, and Temple-Thorpe had again assumed its usual air of quiet and repose. Lord Lindsay, the last remaining visitor had departed, accompanied by his friend Reginald, and the two had gone together, to spend some time at his Lordship's shooting box on —— Moor. These few days, however, had served to give birth to, and to ripen and mature, many plots and schemes which were destined to work a fearful change in the position of two, at least, of the principal characters of our story; and still further to

augment the bitter sufferings of the Widow and the fatherless. Hour after hour, during the course of each succeeding day, had Mr. Belmont and his son been regularly closeted together, and hour after hour had the unhappy Marian been as regularly subjected to a *tete-à-tete* with her impassioned and persevering admirer. How far, however, Lord Lindsay had succeeded in his endeavours to ingratiate himself into her favour, to win from her a willing acceptance of his suit, we need not at this moment enquire; more especially as the events of the next few days are calculated to set at rest every doubt we may entertain on the subject. Suffice it for the present to say, his Lordship had left Temple-Thorpe more fully bent than ever on conquering, what he was pleased to term the childish scruples, the unmeaning objections of his first love, and he cherished within his heart a pretty certain hope that he should be able ere long to look upon Marian Belmont as his bride. At the request of Mr

Belmont he had already promised, so soon as the shooting season was over, that he would again return to, and spend some time at, Temple-Thorpe. So far, to all appearance, at least, everything seemed to be in train; and as far as public rumour might be accredited, the consummation of the affair was now beyond all further doubt or disputation. Appearances, however, are always more or less deceitful, and public rumours are little better than an old wife's story—generally much more plausible than true.

Mr. Belmont, somewhat fretted and annoyed, was pacing slowly to and fro in the library, and every now and then standing for a moment by the window and gazing anxiously across the Park in manifest anticipation of the arrival of a visitor. The day, however, was drawing rapidly towards a close, and the dim and dusky shades of twilight had already shut out the more distant landscape from the eye. The scene was calm and tranquil, and general quiet and repose

seemed universally to prevail. Mr. Belmont's feelings, albeit, were but little in unison with nature's harmonies—his heart was restless and disturbed—and to him, it was clearly evidenced, the advancing night brought neither quietude nor rest. The current of his thoughts was dark and threatening, and could we, at that moment, have penetrated the mysterious arcana of the mind, we should, doubtless, have been startled and dismayed by the knowledge we might have acquired.

"'Tis strange," said he at length, looking from the window for at least the fiftieth time, "that Bigsby should not have arrived long ere this. My summons was imperative, and he was fully apprised that the matter respecting which his services would be required was urgent, and admitted not of delay. Methinks he has grown somewhat tardy and inattentive of late, but no matter, no matter—I am in no humour to brook his caprices, and the sooner he rids himself of

them the better ; and yet—yet, I cannot—I dare not quarrel with him.”

For a little while he was again silent—and again, as heretofore, he paced slowly to and fro the apartment.

“ Yes, yes,” resumed he, his thoughts having run into another channel, “ Reginald, though somewhat hasty and impetuous, counselled well ; and much as I dislike the step we have decided on, circumstances force it upon us ! Hence, what need of scruple or hesitation ? Necessity has no law ; and what are the best of men, after all, but the mere puppets, the mere slaves of chance and circumstance. Marian is obstinate, self-willed, and it may be, as Reginald assumes that she is already plighted to another. No matter, no matter—I have set my heart upon her marriage with Lord Lindsay, and, cost what it may, my mandate shall be obeyed. Once *his*, once fairly bound, beyond all power of escape, and the chain, heavily as it may press at first, will soon wear lightly enough.

Ay, ay, 'tis wondrous strange how soon humanity adapts itself to life's necessities."

At that moment a loud knocking was heard at the outer door of the mansion, and ere many minutes had elapsed the sound of approaching footsteps re-echoed through the vestibule. Mr. Belmont's eye brightened, a smile settled upon his cheek, and one would have thought that every feeling of anger and ill-humour had passed away, so bland and courteous were his manners, when his servant, a little while afterwards, threw open the library door, and announced—

"Mr. Septimus Bigsby!"

Of personal appearance Mr. Bigsby had little, if anything, to boast. He was about the middle size, with an exceedingly macilent figure, and a strikingly cadaverous countenance. His eyes, though dark, were anything but brilliant or intellectual; and the general expression of his countenance was of that questionable nature which invariably leaves one altogether undecided as to the real

character, and renders it a matter of no slight difficulty for us to determine whether in our intercourse with such a man, we have to deal with (using the world's old phrase) "a rogue or a fool!" That Mr. Septimus Bigsby was either one or the other of these characters, a physiognomist would at once have concluded there was but little, if any, doubt; without, however, at all laying claim to any of the advantages either of physiognomy, or of any other "onomy" or "ology" whatever, our own individual opinion of Mr. Bigsby, from the first moment we came across his path, went something beyond this—and we were at once satisfied that in him, we pretty clearly recognized the two characters most singularly combined. That he was in heart and principle an arrant rogue, we had no doubt; but that he had sufficient cunning and forethought ever to become an adept in his roguery, we much questioned. Of all the men we ever knew, Bigsby, perhaps above every other, was the most des-

pieable in our eyes ; not, by any means, that he had been discovered *flagrante delicto* more frequently than many we could have fixed upon, but that he invariably sought to shield himself and his flagrancies beneath a false and specious character. He was one of those outside professors of religion who know no more, in fact, of religion's true spirit and influence, than those who discard it altogether. At every time, and on every occasion, opportune or not, he was to be found vehemently holding forth, and setting himself forward as the censor of the vices and immoralities of the age in which he lived. He was a noted tract writer, and (as we have already seen) a very general tract distributor. Religion, with him, like the player's tinselled garb, was assumed merely to cheat and impose upon the credulity of the world. Fortunately, however, there is a "righteousness over much" by which we may generally detect the mere puritan and the hypocritical professor—and which, should

we fail—even to do this, seldom, if ever, exists for any great length of time without defeating its own ends, and laying open to public condemnation and abhorrence the characters of those who have recklessly dared to prostitute, for their own mean, selfish, dishonest gain, the one true source of universal happiness and justice.

Of the progenitors of Mr. Septimus Bigsby we know nothing, nor is it even necessary for our purpose that we should here pause to inquire into the condition of his very early life ; we may perhaps, however, safely conclude (adopting the poet's aphorism) that as the tree inclined, the twig had formally been bent.

Somewhere between the twenty-fifth and thirtieth year of his age Mr. Bigsby had been regularly installed as managing clerk in the office of Mr. Percival André Belmont, who was at that time carrying on an extensive practice, and whose name upon the

whole, stood respectably with the public as well as with his professional brethren. It so happened, however, that what is generally termed the "dirty work of the office," was always transacted by Mr. Bigsby, and it followed, as a matter of course, that when anything went seriously wrong, Mr. Bigsby had to bear the blame—which, for some years, Mr. Bigsby certainly did bear with a degree of patience and fortitude altogether incomprehensible—that is, assuming for the nonce, that he was maligned unjustly, and accused of sins not his own. Patience and forbearance, nevertheless, generally win their own reward—so was it with Bigsby. After a servitude of some years the managing, became the articulated, clerk—free of all cost and expense—and so requisite to Mr. Belmont had his services at this period become, that Bigsby already saw a partnership in prospective. It so chanced, however, that within a few months after his articles had expired, and

he had been duly admitted an attorney, and created also by the Lord Chancellor for the time being, a "Master extra," &c., that Mr. Belmont suddenly and unexpectedly came into possession of the estate of Temple-Thorpe; whereupon the latter gentleman immediately withdrew from his profession, and was succeeded in his office, and to some extent also in his practice, by the patient, forbearing, fortunate Mr. Septimus Bigsby.

This sudden and marvellous change in the fortunes of the lucky attorney formed, as such changes generally do, a "nine-days' wonder" for the gossip of the world. Mr. Belmont had all his life long had the reputation of being a thorough bargain-making, money-loving man; and how he should have thought of allowing Bigsby, without any pecuniary consideration, to succeed to a practice which, had it been offered to public competition, would unquestionably have realised a considerable amount of money, was altogether inexplicable.

Mr. Septimus Bigsby listened to everybody, carefully remarked everything everybody had to say, but, like a prudent man, said nothing himself.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"You are late, Sir, late," said Mr. Belmont, directing his visitor to a chair on the opposite side of the table to his own.

"I am, Sir—very late; but the fact is, when your messenger arrived at L——, I had only just returned from Doncaster, where—"

"Business had detained you, I presume, somewhat longer than you anticipated?"

"Duty, Mr. Belmont, not business. I have been, Sir," and the attorney glanced somewhat doubtingly on his companion as he spoke, "engaged on a very profitless, though, at the same time, a very necessary errand."

"Profitless!"

"That is, profitless *in presenti*, though it may prove far otherwise *in futuro*. You are doubtless aware, Sir, that the race week is now on at Doncaster, and, as usual on such occasions, the town is one vast den of wickedness and debauchery."

"Umph !"

"And being as I am, a member of Mr. ——'s flock, and having also several of my best clients similarly situated, I felt that, as a consistent and upright Christian—"

"Well, well !"

"Having a due regard for my own character, as well as for the good opinions of my friends, I could not do better than run down for a day or two to this demoralizing scene, and endeavour, to the best of my humble abilities, to counteract as much as possible the evil influences which were at work."

"And, of course, you neglected not to make use of your old, and hitherto fortunate stratagem, eh? If one may judge, Bigsby,

that tract business has brought no small amount of grist to your coffers."

"It has brought, Sir, an immense number of clients to my office, and, as a matter of course, a client rarely comes there that *he* does not leave his money behind him. But, independently of this view of the matter, Mr. Belmont, which is perhaps, after all, a very secondary and unimportant one, I cannot but feel that, by pursuing such a line of conduct, one is able to satisfy many qualms and misgivings of conscience."

"And to reason one's self into the belief," interposed Mr. Belmont, somewhat sharply, "that we are really practising religion for religion's sake! Is it not so?"

"Well—yes—I do believe you are right; and I assure you, Sir, I never go out on one of these charitable and Christian missions—"

"That you do not estimate the result beforehand; nor yet do you ever feel satisfied that your labour has won its due reward, until you have managed, somehow or other,

to increase the bulk of your own purse and lightened those of your hearers—the witless dupes of your hypocrisy !”

“ Dupes, Mr. Belmont ?”

“ Ay, dupes, Mr. Bigsby ; as you know, I always like to call everything and everybody by a proper name—hence I, at all times, endeavour to make use of the most plain and intelligible terms.”

“ True, I had forgotten for the moment that this has ever been one, at least, of your cardinal virtues,” replied the attorney, and a cold, cynical, though by no means an inexpressive smile, settled for an instant on his face.

“ It has, Sir, except—” Mr. Belmont stopped suddenly.

“ Never mind the exception—I understand you, and that is sufficient.”

“ Be it so.—Let us now put an end to this useless badinage, and from this time forward, Bigsby, let me warn you never again to introduce your stratagems, religious or

otherwise, as a subject of conversation between us ; practise upon others as you please, but attempt not to practise upon me ;” and a slight blush of indignation crimsoned Mr. Belmont’s cheek.

“ I was wrong, Sir, I was wrong,” replied the attorney, making a profound obeisance as he spoke ;—he would have added, however, had he dared to do so, “ Honesty amongst thieves is ever a wise and safe policy.”

At this moment a servant, in accordance with a previous order from his master, entered the apartment, bearing a silver-salver, well stored with choice wines, and various confections suited to the palate of a bon-vivant. Mr. Bigsby, though never, perhaps, publicly known to have been really intoxicated, was a deep drinker, and would, when he had a chance of doing so on the sly, and without fear of detection, indulge to an extent calculated seriously to detract from, if not altogether to overthrow, the powers both

of his mental and physical faculties. When once in his cups, however, he was ready to undertake anything or everything that might be proposed to him ; and once having undertaken a thing, he was never known to have drawn back. Mr. Belmont had studied his character for years ; he now knew him thoroughly, and had only to pander to his humour to enlist him, heart and soul, in his service, be that service what it might.

“ Well now, Bigbsy, we will at once proceed to business, if you please,” said Mr. Belmont, the contents of the first decanter being pretty nearly drained to the bottom.

“ Sir, you have only to intimate your wishes, and I am ready to obey them.”

“ ’Tis well. The matter I have now in hand will require your prompt and strict attention.”

“ And be assured, Sir, I will give it.”

“ You remember the widow Belmont.”

“ I do.”

“ And her son ?”

"Yes."

"Some years ago, when I first came into possession of Temple-Thorpe, the Abbey Cottage, as you are aware, was untenanted; and at your suggestion——"

"The widow and her son were allowed to become its occupants."

"Right—and from that day to this they have lived there undisturbed, free of all cost and expense."

"Well."

"And had it not been for an event, of which I need not at this moment enter into particulars, it is probable they might have continued to do so for some years to come. Circumstances, however——"

"Umph!" interposed the attorney, again filling his glass and draining its contents to the bottom.

"Circumstances, I repeat, Bigsby, have arisen which render it absolute necessary that they should be at once removed."

"And you would have *me* turn them out,

I suppose, eh?" demanded Bigsby, shrugging up his shoulders, and fixing his cold, cynical glance sternly upon his companion's face.

"I would—the sooner the better."

"It's a dirty piece of business, Mr. Belmont, very dirty! and yet, if it must be—why——"

"In a word, Bigsby, I tell you it must be done, and done quickly—consequently, if you refuse to act for me I must avail myself of the services of some other party."

Mr. Bigsby again resorted to the decanter, smiled ironically, but offered no reply.

"Methinks, you have so long accustomed yourself to play the saint, that you are now becoming humanity-monger in earnest," exclaimed Mr. Belmont, sharply.

"Bad as I may be, Sir, I cannot forget how much the Widow Belmont and her son have already suffered at our hands. I would fain be spared——"

"All further interference in the matter, eh?" angrily demanded Mr. Belmont.

The attorney was again silent.

"Well, well, Bigsby, it is pretty certain all further connection between us must now be at an end."

"You think so?" said Bigsby, coldly.

"I tell you, Sir, it *shall* be so."

"Ay, there you are mistaken, depend upon it. Think—think—Mr. Belmont, for a little while, and I doubt not but you will change your opinion. Such close, such intimate friends, cannot afford to quarrel about trifles."

Mr. Belmont became deathly pale; his lips quivered, his eyes flashed with an unusual brightness, and his whole frame shook with anger and vexation.

"Now listen to me, Sir, for a moment," said the attorney, "and then decide on your own course. It is now nearly twenty years since I first entered into your service; for the greater part of that time I have been cognizant of almost every transaction which has taken place in your office. I know much

—much, Sir, which it might not be at all convenient should be made public to the world. True, it may be, I am indebted to you for my present fortune; my present position in society—but I count myself in no wise your debtor, Mr. Belmont. We are under mutual obligations; and be assured, Sir, if a day of reckoning should come, you will have no less reason to regret it than myself. Even Temple-Thorpe——”

“For Heaven’s sake, Bigsby, hold your tongue! I . . . I . . . spoke warmly; I was wrong, very wrong!” exclaimed Mr. Belmont, cringing beneath the fierce glance of his companion. “Come, come, send round the wine, let us forget what has passed . . . and, and be friends as usual.”

And for some time Mr. Belmont and his companion drank deeply; both, however, seemed too much occupied by their own thoughts to renew a conversation which had been brought so abruptly to an end. For once Mr. Belmont had evidently allowed his

impetuosity to mislead him—and thus placed himself in a difficulty which for the moment seemed in a fair way of marring his project altogether. Mr. Bigsby, as we have already observed, was, when fairly in his cups, ready to undertake anything and everything which might chance to be thrown in his way; but, like many other men addicted to intemperance Mr. Bigsby was most cross, petulant, and perverse up to what may, perhaps, not unjustly be termed the ‘medium point’ of inebriety. That is, in fact, to say, when he was but half intoxicated he was apt and ready to pick a quarrel with everybody, and had difficulty even in maintaining a good humour with himself, but the rubicon once absolutely passed, he was all things to all men, obliging, pliant, and submissive as the most exacting master could desire.

An hour’s hard drinking—the rubicon *was* passed, and the puritanical attorney was, in every sense of the word, thoroughly inebriated.

"So, Bigsby," said Mr. Belmont, thoroughly satisfied of the condition of his companion, "you would rather not have anything to do with this affair of the widow Belmont's, eh?"

"Why . . no . . no! I did not mean to say that exactly."

"I thought not, indeed, my good fellow."

"But you see, the fact is just this, Mr. Belmont; I—I—always examine my ledger as well as my conscience every night of my life—'pon my soul I do, Sir; and if I happen to find business done and no grist, why then I naturally enough say to myself—*cui bono*?"

"Ah, ah! I see you have not forgot the lesson I took so much pains to instil into you!" replied Mr. Belmont, falling in with the humour of his friend.

"'Twere strange an' I did, Sir, taking into consideration that I have served pretty nearly three apprenticeships to the craft."

"Then look you, Bigsby," said Mr. Bel-

mont, taking out his purse and emptying its contents upon the table, "there, there, let those bright sovereigns serve as an earnest of our agreement."

"Tush, tush! Mr. Belmont, I didn't mean that; and yet I am damnably poor—I am, Sir, 'pon my soul I am."

"Well, well—be that as it may, I know not. It is only fair and reasonable, however, that every man should be paid for what he does—labour is, at all times, worthy of its reward."

"Right, Mr. Belmont right! You speak, as you ever did, like an oracle of wisdom; and coinciding, as I do, heart and soul, with the sentiment you have just uttered——"

"You will accept the fee?"

"I will, Sir."

"And see that the Abbey Cottage be cleared of its present occupants as soon as possible."

"To-morrow, Sir — to-morrow, if you

please. The Widow Belmont is a mere tenant at will ; nothing more, Sir, nothing more—give the word, and out she goes.”

“Ay, ay, but remember, Bigsby, the affair must wear an *outside* appearance of justice to the world—whatever may be its real merits.”

“Trust *me* for that, Sir—my own reputation is at stake as well as yours, and I am not going to jeopardize that lightly, depend upon it ! No, no—I’ve not been so many years under your tuition to no purpose. As some clever but confounded play-writing, and for aught I know to the contrary, play-acting fellow too, once said,

‘ He who steals my purse steals trash,
But he who filches from me my good name
Takes that which nought enriches him,
But leaves me poor indeed.’

“Bravo ! Bravo ! Bigsby — you grow eloquent in your cups,” exclaimed Mr. Belmont.

“Eloquent ! Why, Sir,” replied the

attorney, again filling his glass, and draining, at one gulp, its contents to the bottom, "why, Sir, this is a nectar for the Gods."

"Right, Bigsby—drink—drink—drink!"

And Mr. Septimus Bigsby did drink; ay, even as he had often done before, until chairs, tables, and everything around him grew gradually more and more indistinct; and his head falling back upon his shoulders, he fell into a deep sleep.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT a glorious thing is it, after a season of festivity and revelry—a season of masking and disguise, throughout which one has been compelled to wear upon the cheek a smile of joy and gratulation—while the heart was heavy and oppressed—feeding, in secret, on the bitter memories of its hidden woes—to retire to one's own quiet resting place, and there to enjoy the thousand pleasures of solitude and repose. There is a luxury in self-communion, which few can thoroughly appreciate, who have not experienced the withering blights of sorrow and disappointment.

For some days, after the departure of Lord Lindsay and Reginald from Temple-Thorpe, Marian Belmont was left almost entirely to herself, her father being too much occupied by his own engagements, as well, perhaps,

as but too little disposed, to request her presence and companionship. Thus, freed from the persevering solicitations of the one, and the harassing observations of the other, her young spirits were rapidly regaining somewhat of their accustomed lightness and elasticity ; and now, that the immediate cause of her sorrow and solicitude was no longer nigh at hand, she found little difficulty in cheating herself into the belief, that her destiny was not so dark and threatening as she had but a little while ago been inclined to suppose. Hope—the blandest of all life's bland deceivers !—shed its cheering sunlight on her path ; and tinged her heart's fair dreams with a witchery peculiar to itself. There is no scene so dark, no destiny so terrible, but that hope may still find some spot, some green oasis in the desert, on which to raise its flattering and delusive shrine. Fearful, indeed, would it be, were it not so ! Stronger and more enduring must be the heart, than ever yet was the heart of man, that would be able to sustain to life's

end the accumulated woes, common to poor humanity ; had we no hope, no light, to gild the distant future with its witching and seductive ray ! Who, that has drained the bitter chalice of sorrow and misfortune to its dregs, that has seen the bright day-dreams of his young life, one after another, fade, darken, and, decay ; who, that has found treachery, and deceit, where, in the first outburst of his own warm and impassioned feelings he had deified, as he thought, simplicity and truth, would not be utterly prostrate and cast down, were it not for the still small voice of hope whispering in his ear. Or, alas, who that has ever seen his one treasured idol, pale, sicken, and depart—and has heard, as her lifeless and coffined form was consigned to its parent earth, those dull and heart-sickening words, “ Ashes to ashes, dust to dust ;” that would not have been ready to exclaim, “ My affliction is greater than I can bear ;” had not hope, like the bright star of night, steadily shone forth amidst the dark and impenetrable clouds that

curtained the future from his sight; a small, yet certain harbinger of promise! Hope, blessed Hope! thou art ever with us! from the first outset of life to the very confines of the grave, there, there thou art, still sustaining, still cheating 'us in our grief. The last tie may be rent—the last link broken—and yet Hope, soul-inspiring Hope! thy voice is not yet hushed; thy harmony not yet powerless. Supported and inspired by thy good spirit, we then feel how truly, in the language of poesy, we may say—

“Alas, for love, if *thou* wert all,
And nought beyond, oh Earth!”

Marian Belmont had made many a stolen visit to the Abbey Cottage, and enjoyed many a long hour in calm and friendly communion with its solitary inhabitant. Old age and youth were wondrous kind and familiar; but then the Widow Belmont's old age was not 'crabbed;' nor was the gentle Marian's youth 'like summer's morn.*' Sorrow and af-

* “Crabbed age and youth, they cannot live together;
The one's like summer's morn, the other winter's
weather.”

Shakespeare.

fiction had saddened and purified their hearts, and they had become, each unto the other, ministering spirits of comfort and consolation. Seldom, however, if at all, had Mr. Belmont's name passed their lips ; though to him, and him alone, might both have traced their sorrow and distress. But, much as the Widow Belmont had suffered, such were the righteous feelings of her heart, that she would have suffered ~~more~~, ten thousand times more, had it been possible, ere she would have breathed one word in disparagement of the father in his daughter's ear ; and harsh and arbitrary as that father's conduct had been towards his child, the loving, the warm-hearted Marian never condemned, never blamed him. They sought not how they should repay evil for evil, but how they might overcome evil by good.

" Well, my dear Marian, I am so delighted to see you," said the Widow Belmont, as the young girl tripped lightly into the little sitting room, one bright sunny morning, at an earlier hour than usual. " I have *such* a piece of

news for you!—Nay, do not look so astonished, it is perfectly true, I assure you.”

“News, Mrs. Belmont?”

“Ay, news, love! I have just received a letter from Walter.”

Marian’s heart beat a trifle quicker than usual, and a somewhat deeper blush than common crimsoned her cheek and brow.

“And whom do you think he had for a travelling companion from L—— to London?” inquired the overjoyed mother, without observing the momentary excitement of her companion.

“Ah! there, my good friend, you puzzle me,” replied Marian, throwing off her bonnet, and taking her seat upon the nearest chair.

“Why, none other than your own dear friend, Lady Markington.”

“And did they recognise each other? Did they meet as friends?” eagerly inquired the young girl.

“Yea, Marian, as old, warm-hearted friends! Walter is in perfect raptures with the frank, ingenuous, demeanour of her lady-

ship ; and speaks of her in such glowing terms of admiration, as would almost lead one to believe his passions have got the whip-hand of his reason."

"I am glad, very glad," replied Marian, her bright eyes strongly corroborating her assertion, "Lady Markington is, without exception, one of the most kind, amiable little creatures in the world, and she will be able to introduce Walter into the very first-rate society. Her reunions, I am told, were last season attended by the most important magnates of the day ; and were altogether looked upon as the most agreeable assemblies of the kind which have taken place for some years. Her circle of acquaintance is not large, but it is well chosen ; and in this fact, I understand, rests the secret of her success."

"Already, Walter tells me, her ladyship has invited him to become her guest ; and even more than this, she has promised to make him acquainted with many parties, who may have it in their power to benefit him in his profession, should he ever stand in need of patronage."

"Dear, kind soul! She is one of the few people in this world who are really good for goodness's sake. I wish, Mrs. Belmont, you had ever been introduced to her; you would then have been better able to appreciate Walter's good fortune," exclaimed Marian; and it would have been difficult to have said, at that moment, whether the Widow or her young visitor were most delighted with the tidings they had received.

"And he tells me also—but, la! Marian, why should I go on detailing a sentence here, and a sentence there? See, love, take the letter, and read it for yourself."

Marian hesitated.

"Nay, there are no secrets, girl—at least, none with which you may not safely be entrusted. Read, dear, read."

Marian had no longer the heart, neither had she any very particular inclination to refuse the Widow's confidence. For some time the young girl's countenance was calm and placid as usual; on drawing, however, to the conclusion of the joy-diffusing missive, a deep blush

suddenly spread upon her cheek, and her hand trembled with excitement.

“Dear, dear,” exclaimed the Widow, remarking the change, “I had quite forgotten the postscript; but never mind, Marian, it contains only a few words in your own praise. And, after all, praise well-deserved and honestly bestowed, needs not call forth the blush of its recipient.”

Marian replied not, but handing back the letter to her companion, coloured, perhaps, more deeply than ever.

We have been thus particular in recording the above conversation, simple and unmeaning as it may really appear, in order that the reader may be enabled to form something like a true conception of the state of the Widow Belmont’s feelings on the morning in question. It was long, long ago, since she had ever before experienced the same lightness and buoyancy of heart, the same elasticity of spirits. Many a bright vision floated rapidly through her mind, and many a bright hope lighted up the flattering current of her

thoughts. She felt, and how could she do otherwise, after so fair and promising an outset, that humbled and cast down as they had been, Walter would not fail to redeem his word—he would become the architect of his own fortune! the creator of his own greatness!

Such, however, is the mysterious course of human destiny, that we little know how closely our good and evil fortunes are allied—how brief a step there is between our choicest pleasures and our bitterest cares. A day, an hour, and life's brightest sunshine may be veiled in clouds—life's highest hopes dispelled and overthrown.

CHAPTER XX.

It was not until near noon that Marian Belmont took her departure from the Abbey Cottage, and scarcely had her light and fairy footstep passed its threshold, when a somewhat loud and imperative "ran-tan-tan" at the little brass door-knocker, announced the arrival of a second visitor. The summons was speedily answered, and Mr. Septimus Bigsby, attorney at law, was duly ushered into the little breakfast parlour.

It was quite evident that Mr. Bigsby, on this occasion, had bestowed more than usual attention on his morning's toilette, and had forgotten nothing which might be, in any way, calculated to add to the general improvement of his personal appearance, or to the grave character which he manifestly thought it necessary to assume. He was habited from

top to toe in his "Sunday's best," a suit of well-cared-for and carefully preserved black cloth, the sombre appearance of which, however, was wonderfully relieved by a stiff white cravat, an unusually wide shirt ruffle, a high collar, and long wristbands. He carried an immensely thick gold-headed cane, more clerical than legal in its look, in his hand; and a large bundle of papers and a string of red tape might be seen peeping from the capacious pocket of his outer garment. An air of mysterious and serious importance sat upon his face, and his features, plain almost to ugliness, were screwed up to the most approved saint-like and puritanical form. To have looked upon him at that moment, one could scarcely have avoided coming to the conclusion, that he was either one of the most pure, simple-minded, inoffensive beings in the world—or that, like the professing hypocritical Mawworm, he was a very devil in a saint's disguise. So thoroughly master, however, of the character he assumed, and so cunningly skilled in the part he was about

to play, Mr. Bigsby might safely have hazarded the opinion of nine-tenths of the world, and in so doing, he would doubtless have had the satisfaction of coming off with the best of it. A little outside show, a respectable dress, and a saint-like demeanour, have a wonderful effect. After all, however, as sure as 'murder will out,' hypocrisy will, sooner or later, be exposed—the tail and the cloven foot are awkward appendages, and though they may be concealed for a time, they are pretty certain to betray their owner in the end.

Even his Satanic majesty himself, when, as we are told by the poet, he took it into his head

“ To visit his snug little farm on the earth,
And see how his flock went on ;”

was, despite all his cunning machinations and devilry, unable altogether to conceal those fearful and terrible deformities ; and although, like the attorney Bigsby, he had

triggered himself out for the occasion in "his Sunday's best," with

"A coat of black and breech of blue,

There was a hole behind where his tail came through."

Well, there, in the little breakfast parlour of the Abbey Cottage, sat Mr. Septimus Bigsby, face to face with the Widow Belmont.

"I regret, Madam," said he, "that it is my painful duty to have to wait upon you this morning ; but, the fact is, were we professional men to follow the dictates of feeling—to indulge even the ordinary sympathies of mankind—one half the business transactions with which we have to deal would necessarily remain unfulfilled."

"Sir !" exclaimed the Widow, becoming suddenly pale and much agitated.

"I assure you, Madam," continued the attorney, without noticing her exclamation, or even so much as raising his eyes from the ground, "what I tell you is perfectly true ; a stranger could not possibly form the slight-

est conception of the bitter sufferings we have to go through, the heavy and afflicting trials we have to sustain ; many and many a time have I vowed within my heart that I would abandon the law altogether, and adopt some other profession or business, more in accordance with the better impulses of my nature ; and yet a man so far advanced in years as myself, and one too wholly dependent on his own endeavours for a livelihood, cannot afford to adopt so independent a line of conduct, as one more happily and fortunately circumstanced."

" Pray, pray, Sir, will you, without further preface, have the kindness to tell me the object of your visit ?"

" Pardon me a moment, Madam, and you shall hear all. I think it right, however, at all times, thus to premise ; and on an occasion like the present I feel that I should have but ill-discharged my duty, either towards my client or yourself, had I, without some such explanation as I have offered, at once entered

upon the business I have in hand. It is only, Madam, I can assure you, the man who has grown grey in his profession, who has so long been accustomed to the most painful and harrowing scenes of suffering and distress, that his better feelings have become wholly blunted and destroyed, who would ever think of pursuing so cold and unchristian a course; moreover, let me tell you, Madam, that by so doing I know well that much error and misapprehension might arise, and that the conduct of my client, as well as of myself, would be liable to be regarded in a most unfair, a most unjust light."

"Of this, Sir," replied the Widow, somewhat bitterly, "you may be assured: whatever may be the nature of your business, I shall not hastily impute improper or unworthy motives either to yourself or to the party on whose behalf you may happen to appear."

"It is seldom, Madam, that gentlemen of my profession are destined to listen to such

an avowal—an avowal so truly imbued with the spirit of Christian charity and love, that one might almost conclude, and that without being guilty of any impiety, that the heart—”

“I beseech you, Sir,” interposed the Widow, a shade of indignation settling for the moment on her brow, “forbear these unnecessary comments.”

“Well, well, Madam, as you please,” replied the attorney, somewhat reluctantly, feeling, nevertheless, that any further attempt at hypocritical display would mar, rather than assist, the object he had in view.

“I had an interview last evening, Madam,” continued the attorney, after a brief pause, “with your most worthy relative and my sincere friend, Mr. Belmont, of Temple-Thorpe.”

“Well, Sir.”

“And amongst other matters—many of them of much more serious importance, though probably *you* may scarcely be in-

clined to think so—the affairs of the Abbey Cottage were under consideration.”

“ Pray, Sir, proceed.”

“ And I find, Madam, that at this moment Mr. Belmont is contemplating many changes—many alterations—into the particulars of which it is wholly unnecessary I should now enter.”

Mr. Bigsby paused; the Widow Belmont, however, offered no reply, but sat, her eyes firmly rivetted on his face, anxiously awaiting his further communication.

“ Amongst the rest is the dismantling, or otherwise, of the Abbey Cottage— ”

“ The Abbey Cottage ! ” interposed the Widow, no longer able to restrain her feelings. “ Surely, surely, you do not mean that the Abbey Cottage is to be disturbed, and that I am again to be thrown upon the world—poor, houseless, destitute ? ”

“ Ah, Madam, you know not, I assure you, the trouble and disquietude the very

thought of your removal caused the kind-hearted and considerate Mr. Belmont; but then—”

“ But then, Sir, after all, the kind-hearted and considerate Mr. Belmont, as you are pleased to call the present master of Temple-Thorpe, *did* decide that I should be removed—*did* decide that I should no longer eke out the little remnant of my days within the precincts of his princely domain—once, once our own—but now—now another’s;” and there was a bitterness in her voice which seemed, for the moment, to have moved even the hard and obdurate heart of her visitor.

“ Yes, Madam, it was even so; and the object of my visit to-day, I need now scarcely tell you, is to apprize you of that fact. It is a painful, a most painful duty, Madam, and, as I before said—”

“ Mr. Bigsby, it matters not; Mr. Belmont is now in a position to command, *I* have only to obey.”



"Upon my word, you view this matter most philosophically ; and I assure you Mr. Belmont will be delighted to find that you do so."

"Think not, however, Sir," replied she, speaking in a somewhat louder tone, and with more firmness than she had hitherto assumed. "Think not, neither allow Mr. Belmont to think, that it costs me but a slight effort, a temporary ebullition of feeling, to give up the Abbey Cottage—to become, as I now too clearly perceive, from this day forward, I must become—a stranger—an outcast—from Temple-Thorpe. It is a hard, a fearful destiny, Mr. Bigsby, and one to which I should not so readily yield myself did I not feel that I am now powerless, and at the mercy and disposal of another. Well, well, the sin is on my own head, and it is right—right, perhaps, after all, that I should suffer."

"True, very true, Madam ; but patience and repentance are amongst the cardinal

virtues, and all who practise them shall reap a rich reward ;” and Mr. Bigsby sighed heavily.

“ Sir,” replied the Widow, having regarded her visitor for a little while with a stern and penetrating glance, “ Sir, talk not to me of patience, preach not to me of repentance ; it is no part of *your* duty ; and in taking upon yourself such an office, you are unjustly assuming the privilege of this world’s most sacred and holy profession. Silence, Sir, silence, I command you. And yet— and yet—” continued the Widow, in a subdued voice, and evidently communing with herself, rather than addressing her companion : “ Out on these priests with their mummeries, and out on their war upon human hearts.”

This sudden outburst had taken the attorney by surprise, and for some minutes he was evidently at fault, uncertain whether to prosecute the subject further, or at once to bring the interview to a close. Unwilling,

however, to submit to anything wearing even the appearance of a defeat, he adopted the former alternative.

"Pray pardon me, Madam; I did not mean to offend you."

"I am willing, Sir, to believe you; at the same time, I must now request that your conversation be addressed solely to the business on hand," replied the Widow, somewhat haughtily. "I am clearly to understand, then, I presume," continued she, after a brief pause, "that Mr. Belmont desires me to leave the Abbey Cottage?"

"Precisely so, Madam. Let me, however, beg of you to regard Mr. Belmont's conduct in its proper light; do not, for one moment, imagine that he is acting at all harshly in this matter, or that he is influenced by any selfish or mercenary motive. The cottage, it is true, is a pretty comfortable little cottage enough, and would readily let for thirty or thirty-five pounds a year, and to many men, similarly situated to Mr. Belmont, no doubt

this would have been a strong temptation, and would have induced them to have acted as he is now doing some time ago ; but to your worthy relative, your sincere friend, I may say, Mrs. Belmont, no one who knows the genuine goodness of his heart would for an instant think of attaching any such uncharitable imputation."

"I am deeply sensible of Mr. Belmont's kindness ; and yet, under the circumstances, I apprehend I have received no more at his hands than what I was fairly entitled to."

"True, Madam, very true ; there *are* certain cases where one has good right to expect these little favours, and, as I have before told you, the very idea of your having to leave here is a source of most harrowing and painful disquietude to your relative ; but necessity, Madam—'necessity,' as the old saw runs, 'has no law.'"

"And the time, Sir," inquired the Widow, eyeing her companion closely, "the time—

have you any communication to make in reference to that?"

"Why no, perhaps, nothing very definite," replied Bigsby, with some little hesitation; "but, I presume your occupation will be governed by the ordinary rules; and, legally speaking, Mrs. Belmont, you are but a tenant at will, and as such——"

"Well, Sir, proceed."

"Liable, of course, to be turned out at any moment; hence——"

"The sooner I go the better, I presume."

"Say rather, my dear Madam, the more convenient for your landlord," replied Bigsby, with an ill-affected smile.

"So, so, that is the case, is it? Now, Mr. Bigsby, I think I thoroughly understand you, and if you have nothing further to communicate you will pardon me when I say that our interview must here come to an end."

And without waiting for Mr. Bigsby's

reply, the Widow Belmont at once summoned her servant to conduct him to the door.

Notwithstanding all the cunning and adroitness with which the attorney flattered himself he had conducted the interview, the "cloven foot" had at last made its appearance. Those few unguarded words, "Liable, of course, to be turned out at any moment,"—had at once confirmed the Widow's worst suspicions, and given the lie to the many asseverations in which Mr. Bigsby had thought it right so freely to indulge.

No sooner had the door of the little breakfast parlour closed, than the heart-stricken Widow, unable longer to restrain the bitter feelings which were struggling within her bosom, sank down upon the nearest chair, buried her face in her hands, and wept bitterly.

CHAPTER XXI.

It will be well, perhaps, for us, at this particular stage of our story, to enter a little more into particulars—though we shall do so as briefly as possible—relative to the real position and pecuniary circumstances of the unfortunate tenant of the Abbey Cottage.

Mrs. Belmont and her son, as we have already stated, had been dispossessed of the mansion and estate of Temple-Thorpe on the death of her husband, which was now some fifteen or sixteen years ago; and it was found at that time, though somewhat contrary to the general expectation, that the deceased gentleman's affairs, so far as his personal estate was concerned, were in anything but a favourable position. His debts and liabilities were very considerable, and it turned

out that after their discharge, the funds available to his widow and his only child were almost entirely swept away. It was then, while the unfortunate woman was suffering from the shock of this second misfortune, that Mr. Percival Andrè Belmont, with a well-assumed air of kindness and generosity, stepped forward and liberally placed the Abbey Cottage at her disposal, allowing her also, at the same time, to select from the rich storehouse of costly treasures at Temple-Thorpe, such few articles of ornament and virtue as she deemed necessary for the adornment of her new abode. Thus circumstanced, the Widow Belmont at once changed her mode of living, reduced in every way possible the amount of her expenditure, and was soon enabled by good management and frugal economy, to render her diminished and comparatively insignificant income adequate to her wants and necessities, and to lay by such a sum as might, in the course of a few years, be requisite for the education of her child.

It is a hard matter, nevertheless, however careful and economical one may be, to lay by a little store for a day of necessity out of an annual income barely sufficient to meet the ordinary expenditure of life, and so the Widow Belmont found; and many were the individual privations and discomforts she had secretly and uncomplainingly endured, ere she had been able to effect the object she had in view. The benefits for which she was indebted to the new master of Temple-Thorpe were, when the princely property to which he had so lately succeeded was taken into consideration, wholly trifling and insignificant; she was, nevertheless, very grateful for them. Every sovereign saved was a matter of consideration, and she could not but feel deeply sensible how much more straitened and harassed she must have been, had she been compelled to have sought a residence elsewhere than at the Abbey Cottage. Well! as we have already said, the Widow Belmont struggled with her

difficulties, and had, even up to the very day spoken of in our last chapter, successfully carried out her object ; few people, perhaps, save Mr. André Belmont and his crafty attorney, having any knowledge of the adverse fortune with which she had to contend. Her little household band had been kept together, appearances maintained, her bills regularly discharged, her son educated—but now, now, alas ! notwithstanding all her prudence and economy, the long-accumulated wealth of her little treasury was nearly run out. Still the Widow Belmont did not despair ; she was ever of a hopeful and sanguine temperament, ready to persevere and struggle to the end !

Scarcely, however, had Mr. Bigsby taken his departure, and the first paroxysm of grief expended its fury, when the difficulties by which she seemed, as it were in a moment, to have been so unexpectedly surrounded, arrayed themselves before her in their most dark and threatening form. For a little while she sat, still, motionless as a statue,

her eyes fixed vacantly on the ground, her cheeks rigid and colourless as marble. Anon, a faint smile stole across her face, a smile half sorrowful, half indignant, and, communing with her own sad and overburdened heart, she murmured bitterly, "Well, well, it is a hard fate, but I will triumph over it." At that moment her eyes rested upon the letter which she had received but a few hours before, and which was now laying half-open upon the table, just as she had received it from the hands of the warm-hearted Marian. That letter! the morning's harbinger of hope and happiness! Scarcely, however, had she raised the cup of pleasure to her lips, ere the ruthless hand of sorrow and misfortune had mingled its gall and wormwood with the draught. Suddenly springing from her chair, she seized the sacred missive in her hands, and once more carefully pondered over its every word! Her brow crimsoned, her eye brightened, and a placid and serene smile, the sunshine of life's

happiest and brightest day, settled upon her cheek. Poor, outcast, heartstricken as she was, she had still *one* treasure ! There was still left one heart, whose every beat would answer responsive to her own—one faithful, honest bosom on which she might lay her weary head and be at rest.

* * * * *

At an early hour on the following morning, a little troop of workmen from the adjoining village arrived at the Abbey Cottage. The carpenters were already at work, and the loud knocking of their busy and destructive hammers re-echoed loudly within its walls. The servants were running to and fro with nimble steps, and the Widow Belmont herself was busily employed. The work of demolition went rapidly on ; room after room was dismantled, treasure after treasure carefully packed and removed, and long ere the bright sun, which seemed in mockery to shine upon that melancholy day, had attained his noon-day meridian, the Abbey Cottage wore



the chilling and forbidding appearance of a lonely and deserted house. Its little well-trimmed garden was trodden under foot by the busy workmen, and its finest flowers broken and destroyed; and as the last van-load of furniture was driven from the door, and the last lingering workman closed the gate upon his steps, one could scarcely have looked upon that melancholy picture without exclaiming—

“All within is dark as night :
In the windows is no light;
And no murmur at the door,
So frequent on its hinge before.

Close the door, the shutters close,
Or through the windows we shall see
The nakedness and vacaney
Of the dark, deserted house.”

Tennyson.

The Widow Belmont, sad and dispirited, accompanied by an old and faithful female domestic, who, like poor Frank Hartwell,

had allied herself to the good and evil fortunes of her house, at once took her departure for L——. There, after having secured an apartment for the remainder of the day, and having, for form's sake rather than from choice or inclination, partaken of a frugal repast, she sat down to perform the last sad duty—a duty she dreaded, perhaps, above all others—her changed fortunes had imposed upon her.

“Poor old Frank Hartwell! What is to become of *him*?” mentally ejaculated she, as she took her place by the table, her writing-desk lying open before her, “what is to become of him? Now that his services are no longer required at the Abbey Cottage, he will be cast upon the world, unemployed, unprovided for in his old age! True, true it is, he has been ever careful and provident, yet, after all, he can have laid up little store for a season of adversity. Oh, that I could have called up sufficient courage to have seen him, to have told him (hard words, hard words,

after long years of honest and faithful servitude for him to listen to) that he must now seek another master, another home. No, no; much as I can bear, I could not have borne this!" She paused for a moment, took a pen in her hand, and scribbled a few lines in a hurried and agitated manner, then suddenly ceasing and again throwing down her pen, she resumed her mental soliloquy. "He is ill too, very, very ill, and Heaven only knows what may be the result! Poor Frank, my heart bleeds for him! I cannot, I will not add to his misery; no, no, no, let it cost me what it may, I will still retain him! Oh God! it would be cruel, very cruel to drive him from us, after what he has done and suffered for our sakes, in his helpless and destitute old age. And who knows—who shall say—but that ere long, our fortunes may again brighten, and that we may again have a house, a garden of our own: and who, who will serve us like old Frank? No, no; I will not dis-

miss him. I will work rather with my own hands to win his wages, than he shall be thrown upon the world, old and destitute, and perhaps,—oh, Heaven! 'tis a fearful thought—be compelled to breathe his last breath in the parish workhouse after all.”

And as this last sad and gloomy thought crossed her mind, she seized the half-written letter in her hand, tore it into fragments, and then committed them to the flames.

“There,” said she, as the last fragment was consumed, “there, I can now again breathe freely. Every evidence of my momentary cold and selfish ingratitude is destroyed! It was a cruel—a wicked thought!”

She again resumed her pen.

With the patient and suffering Job, she might at that moment have said, “Oh, that my grief were weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together! for now

it would be heavier than the sand of the sea."

And yet her letter to Frank Hartwell was full of hope, comfort, and consolation.

Ere another day's sun had risen, the Widow Belmont was far away from Temple-Thorpe.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE news of the Widow Belmont's sudden departure from the Abbey Cottage spread rapidly amongst the villagers, and, as a matter of course, a thousand rumours, a thousand surmisings were speedily afloat—few, if any, having any very close approximation to the truth. It had been pretty clearly ascertained, however, that the lawyer Bigsby, as that worthy was generally called by the honest rustics, had been at the Abbey Cottage on the day previous, hence it was very generally concluded that if he was not absolutely the author of the mischief, he must, at all events, have had a hand in it. And as the villagers in and around Temple-Thorpe entertained no very favourable opinion



of Mr. Bigsby, nor, in fact, of any one else who happened to belong to the same questionable craft, but little doubt was entertained that the Widow Belmont had been hardly dealt with, and that when the real facts of the case should become known, some people who held very high heads, and carried themselves mightily above others, would have good reason to blush for it. Moreover, there were many amongst those simple honest gossips, who could well remember the Widow in her prosperity; many who had been in service at the mansion; and by these, perhaps, above all others, her sudden departure from amongst them was at once set down as the result of some new act of tyranny and oppression either on the part of Mr. Belmont or his agent. One and all, however, evidently *thought* very freely on the matter, and made but little scruple of speaking as freely as they thought. There were certain memories associated with her name, which even the defacing hand of time had not been able

to sweep away! And if the Widow Belmont had been less generous, less bountiful in her offerings to the poor, during the long years she had been settled at the Cottage, than formerly, few, if any, had ever thought of questioning the cause—none had certainly ever thought of her one whit the less kindly. They loved her for what she *had* been, they fondly regarded her for what she *was*. Poor people, such as the honest villagers of Temple-Thorpe, who have to toil all life long and all life through to keep (as the homely saying runs) “body and soul together,” had no need to be told that nothing so soon and so effectually serves to check the exercise of that first, best Christian virtue, gentle Charity, as pinching penury. *Ex nihilo nihil fit*—is a truism beyond all power of reasoning to gainsay.

It is a sad thing to have a large generous heart, and an empty purse!

Leaving the village gossips, however, to pursue their avocation to their heart's con-

tent, we will now take another glance, and see how matters stand at the little cottage of our old friend, Frank Hartwell. The night had already set in ; the window shutters were closed, the white dimity curtains drawn, and a couple of freshly lighted candles were burning upon a little table which occupied the centre of the room. With these, however, the inmates of that clean comfortable looking apartment might well have dispensed ; the clear blaze from the turf fire on the hearth serving to illuminate every nook and corner with light sufficient for every apparent purpose. And, after all, there is a peculiar melancholy in sitting hour after hour working or thinking by firelight, more especially when one has the charge of a sick bed, and has every now and then to steal softly on tip-toe to gaze upon the face of the suffering patient, and carefully to observe its every change ; when one feels that a human life is hanging, as it were, upon a thread ; a thread so fragile and uncertain, that every

moment threatens to be its last. So, doubtless, thought those whose duty it was on this occasion, to be in attendance on old Frank Hartwell.

There, on the same bed where we last saw him, laid that good, honest, warm-hearted old man. His face was much paler, and the general expression of his countenance was indicative of extreme languor and debility. The internal injuries he had sustained by the fall we have elsewhere described, had proved to be of a much more serious character than was at first anticipated, and the medical man who had been in regular attendance upon him since the accident, had latterly thrown out several doubts and misgivings as to the result. Everything, however, that human ingenuity could suggest had been done in the sufferer's behalf, and it was now clearly manifest that a few hours more must decide the struggle in one way or another. "While there is life," says the proverb, so comforting on such an occasion, "there is

hope ;” and the old man had now fallen into a calm and placid sleep, different from what he had enjoyed for some days past—hence we will trust the proverb may be verified, and its strongest hope made good.

How will he awake ?

That was, at this moment, the all-important question—for on that old man’s waking were hung the issues of life and death. “How will he awake?” Who that has seen one near and dear to him laying in this bitter strait, need to be told of the anxiety and watchfulness of such an hour—nay, who that has seen even one with whom he had no tie, no kindred, save that of common humanity and universal brotherhood, thus circumstanced, that does not feel it is an hour once lived through, never afterwards to be forgotten.

The nurse and her companion (for the old woman was either too frightened or too superstitious to be left alone), accustomed as they had been to witness scenes of this pain

ful and harrowing character, appeared more than usually moved. They were sat, one on each side of that bright cheerful-looking fire, gazing vacantly upon the flames as they curled round the bright black bars of the grate, or shot for a moment up the wide chimney, wreathing themselves into a thousand strange and fantastic shapes. Not a word passed their lips, and so watchful were they lest the old man's sleep should be disturbed, that even their very breathings seemed suppressed and low ; and had it not been for the continued and monotonous tick-tack, tick-tack, of an old-fashioned and favourite clock which occupied a place near the bed, that little room would have been scarcely less still and silent than the grave.

The longer hand of that old clock had well-nigh travelled its hourly round since poor old Frank had first closed his eyes in sleep ; and so still, so quiet, had he been during the whole of that time, that his attendants had more than once turned towards the bed with

a somewhat anxious and suspicious look, as though half afraid that that sleep was destined to be his last. And, indeed, to have gazed upon the still pale face of the invalid at that moment, one might well have questioned whether or not the spirit-man had not already "passed that bourne from whence no traveller returns;" whether or not that dull inert mass was but an empty and vacated tenement! The hand, however, was still warm; the heart still maintained its regular, though feeble pulsation.

"Milly, Milly," after a while, said the old man in a weak and tremulous voice, and in a moment the nurse was by his side.

"Well, Frank," replied she, "are you better? You have had a quiet, comfortable sleep."

"Yes, yes, Milly, I am better now. I have slept well, very well. And, oh! Milly, I have had such a dream! I thought that I was again at Temple-Thorpe, and that my

old Master and Mistress were both there, and the little boy, Walter, and everything was right and prosperous, and we were all happy—so happy, Milly ! just as we used to be. But, alas ! Milly, it was only a dream, after all.”

“ Well, well, Frank, never mind. Who knows but better days may yet come ? Who shall say but what your dream may yet prove true ? ” replied Milly, gently smoothing his pillow.

“ No, no, Milly ! that can never be. My poor Master has long been dead, dead ! ” and a tear trickled from the old man’s eye, “ and it will not be long, Milly, before I shall be dead too, and shall be laid like him in the cold, cold grave. Nay, do not cry old woman, the time has not yet come, though I tell you it is not far distant. I have a good work still to do—a work of *justice*, a work of stern retributive justice, Milly ! and God, who knows all things, will spare me

till it is accomplished. There, there, that will do ! you are very good, Milly—very, very good.”

And again the old man closed his eyes, and a smile, placid even as the smile of earliest infancy, shone upon his face.

END OF VOL. I.







